

## Religion & Communism

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## Religion & Communism

Church & the Workers by Bennett Stevens; originally published in 1931 by International Pamphlets, New York

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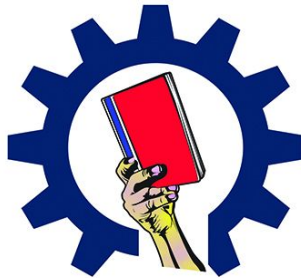
Liberate Oppression by Mark Maxey, 2018

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## Dedication

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We dedicate this to all Cadre who believe with their hearts, minds, and actions in a true New Outlook Revolution!

For one to be true, one must desire wholeheartedly, without reservation, to free themselves and their fellow workers from the bonds of class antagonisms. One who understands the foundations of Marxist-Leninist teachings, understands that their sole purpose in life is to crush capitalism.

We dedicate this reprint of an old classic in hopes that the truths expounded in this book and others will inspire you to take Communism to the next level, using the past expressions of scientific research into the nature of Marxism while adapting it to today's culture.

Remember, Marxist-Leninist ideals are scientific, so put on your "lab coat" do some research of old classics, and begin your new experiments for democratic-socialism.

We hope this book will inspire the reader to join the ranks of cadre working for a better tomorrow for all!

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## Forward

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The chairs of the PCUSA Religious Affairs Commission present these timeless classics as a means to open dialogue. Most of these writings were first published in the early 1930's. This being presented as a jumping off spot, so to speak.

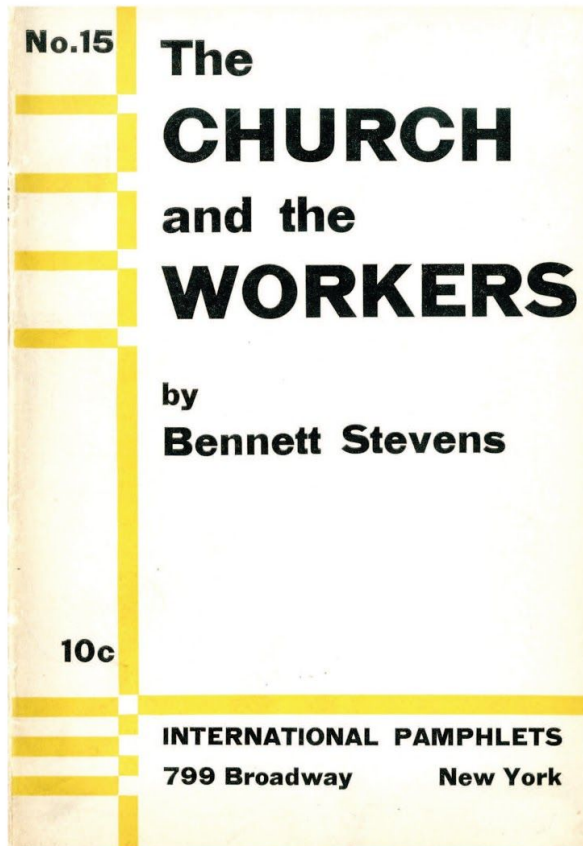
We, as Marxist-Leninist, feel strongly that Marxism is a science. Thus, we are in lab coats experimenting with scientific socialism. It's a trial and error approach. Timeless, but necessary, and even more so in today's age of rising fascism in our world.

Furthermore, our contributions through the Religious Affairs Commission builds upon the very foundation that all persons are important and deserve to be heard. We do not endorse any religion, and accept those from a purely scientific persuasion that may be agnostic, or even atheists. It is hopeful that through our conversations a synthesis is formed that we can offer to better bridge the divide that separate religious institutions.

We hope that through a careful critical analysis of these writings, it may spark a conversation within yourself. We also encourage anyone to reach out to us so that we may include your thoughts along these discussions and examinations. You may reach us at [Info@partyofcommunistsusa.org](mailto:Info@partyofcommunistsusa.org).

In peaceful Solidarity,

Tracy Ford & Mark Maxey  
Co-Chairs  
PCUSA Religious Affairs Commission



## The Church & the Workers

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By Bennett Stevens

THE churches' support of royalty during the recent revolution in Spain, the pope's message on labor, and the concerted attacks of religious bodies all over the world against the Soviet Union, focus attention on the role of religion and the churches in the workers' struggle against their oppressors. The churches have always used their influence and resources to maintain reactionary rulers in power. The Peasants' Revolts at the close of the middle ages against the feudal princes were crushed by great slaughter with the active aid of both the Catholic and Protestant leaders. During the revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe when the rising bourgeoisie was arrayed against the landed aristocracy and monarchy, the churches again joined with the reactionary forces. The French Revolution of 1789 and the revolutions of 1848 throughout Europe were all surging with anti-church spirit because the churches, as buttresses of the established order, passionately resisted the rise of the middle-class. But when the bourgeoisie became the ruling class, it in turn allied itself with the churches against the rising working class. In all capitalist countries the workers, fighting against those who profit from their toil, against those who are responsible for their poverty, for unemployment, for low wages, and miserable working and living conditions, find the churches directly and indirectly aiding the capitalist rulers.

### The Class Teachings of the Church

The doctrines and ritual of the churches are powerful means of developing attitudes of subservience among the workers. The following passage from the Book of Common Prayer expresses the typical message of all religions:

(My duty to my neighbor is ...) to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters . . . and to do my duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call me.

The worker is taught to reconcile himself to his poverty, for it is "God's will"; he is asked to pray that he be dutiful to his employers, that

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he be meek, lowly, and submissive in the presence of his "betters." A supernatural power is pictured that will punish workers if they disobey the rules of order and self-respect which their rulers have established to keep them docile and obedient. Capitalism and its laws and practices are taught to be god-given creations; it becomes irreligious and wicked to challenge them. Workers thwarted and depressed by their misery under capitalism are drawn to the churches by the social and recreational activities which the churches offer as a means of extending their influence. The church takes advantage of the desire of the workers to escape from the drabness of their lives. It offers warmth, music, and comfortable surroundings as an attractive contrast to the barren, cold, and dreary workers' quarters. Religious ritual with its mystic emotionalism is given as solace and consolation to offset the monotony of the hard working day. Workers are given glowing promises of bliss in a future "kingdom of heaven" which divert their attention from efforts to change conditions here. Rewards after death are promised to those workers who are "loyal servants of the Lord" and of their employers, and those who are rebellious are warned of future punishment. By these means the churches attempt to dull any active organized expressions of protest by the workers against their poverty. Religion thus serves, as Karl Marx said, "as the opiate of the people." Churches teach that the sufferings and hardships of the workers are due, not to economic and political causes, but to the "wickedness" and "sinfulness" of man's character. In the words of a famous missionary and hymn writer:

I think Heaven's punishments are due To Atheism and Sedition too; I think for these 'tis God's own sending, And not because our laws need mending.

The churches declare that economic and political changes would be futile because it is not the fault of capitalism that the workers are exploited, but due to erring man who "does not live according to the laws of Christ." They contend that workers will be happier only through a "change in the hearts of men," through "purging hearts from sin," through "accepting the spirit of the living Christ," through "the saving of men's souls."

But men's lives are determined by their jobs, their wages, and the conditions which these permit. When the churches insist that the individual must be transformed before economic and political institutions can be changed, they not only contradict the facts of science but also

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paralyze efforts to change institutions that keep the masses in poverty. The doctrine of "sin" aids the ruling class in another way. Workers are especially warned of the "sins" of "self-importance," of "false ambitions," and of "pleasure," lest they become restless and dissatisfied. The Protestant churches especially have, since their inception, aided the development of capitalism by their emphasis on abstinence and frugality and by their doctrine that wickedness is intrinsic in leisure. Work, no matter how laborious and unrewarded, is glorified as an end in itself. This is shown in the 1910 report of the Joint Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labor of the Episcopal Church of the United States:

Much that is said of the emancipation of labor, much that is urged in certain kinds of socialistic writing and speaking, proceeds upon the assumption that work is an evil to get through in order that abundance of time may be given to pleasure. It is a false ideal. There is a mission for the Church in meeting such ideals by the setting forth of the Christian ideal of service as willing work, as that which gives life value.

In other words, work for one's employer is made the prime purpose of life, the religious duty to which all else is secondary. The more docile the workers are in performing their daily jobs, the more they work for the glory of god. The worker is pictured as a lazy fellow and his religious employers feel a glow of righteousness in making it difficult for him to fritter away his time in "unproductive amusements." Long hours and a meager standard of living are considered but a kindness to the worker. The sight of a poor man amusing himself arouses a feeling of moral indignation in a well-trained religious capitalist.

'Some employers are bringing Christianity directly into the factories. John E. Edgerton, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, Tennessee woolen manufacturer, bitter anti unionist, and exploiter of child labor, in an address in 1930 before a Methodist audience, declared:

I am proud to say that morning prayer exercises in my factory have had the finest economic effects. Workers are producing far more goods than before the prayer system started some years ago. We have made it almost impossible for any one but a Christian to get a job. We

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have been able by that process to keep our plant free from trouble.

Religion is here used as a lubricating oil to speed up the workers, to increase production and to make them pliant to increased exploitation.

### The Strength of the Churches

The churches are effective propaganda agencies for they reached a membership of 50,000,000 persons in 1930. That capitalists are conscious of this fact is shown by the liberality of their donations to the churches. As one of his many contributions to the Episcopal church, J. P. Morgan paid the expenses involved in publishing the revised Book of Common Prayer. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in addition to building a seven million dollar church in New York, gives millions to Baptist colleges and other religious enterprises. In 1929 gifts to Protestant churches in the United States amounted to \$520,000,000. The churches are not "spiritual" institutions but are in themselves powerful, wealthy capitalist corporations and as such have special interests in preserving capitalism. Four billion dollars was the valuation set on 232,000 church buildings alone (not counting other church property investments) and churches spent \$817,000,000 in immediate expenses in 1926, only a very slight portion of which went to "benevolences." The following table indicates the value of church property and expenses of some of the largest sects in the United States in 1926:

### Churches Value of Church Property

#### Expenses

Roman Catholic .....	\$837,271,053	\$204,526,487
Methodist .....	654,736,975	152,151,978
Baptist .....	469,827,795	98,045,096
Presbyterian .....	443,572,158	87,535,390
Episcopal .....	314,596,738	44,790,130
Lutheran .....	273,409,748	59,500,845
Congregational .....	162,222,552	25,820,342
Jewish .....	97,401,688	19,076,451

The vast wealth of the churches, especially of the Catholic churches, comes not only from the capitalists but also from the hard-earned pennies of workers who do not realize the part the churches

are playing as active agents of their employers.

The Salvation Army receives money from "community chests" for "service" among the workers which it uses to taunt workers about their "materialism" and to urge them to "come to Jesus." It had in 1926, buildings valued at \$17,738,506 while it spent \$6,001,317, over two-thirds of which went to salaries and improvements in property. Over seven hundred religious newspapers and magazines are published in the United States with a circulation of over 11,000,000 copies which serve to extend the reactionary influence of the churches into the homes. Youth organizations such as the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A. spread the control of the churches over working class youth through their club activities- the former having the huge sum of \$230,060,000 in property and funds and spending in 1930 alone \$60,609,000 in operating expenses in the United States. By molding opinions of reverence for capitalist authority and by instilling attitudes that condemn rebellion as anti-social and against "the will of god" these powerful propaganda institutions yoke the masses to the churches and try to check any desire of the workers to resist injustices.

### **The Churches and the Unemployed**

Churches participate actively in the daily struggles between workers and employers. During the present economic crisis, when millions of workers are unemployed and employers are slashing the wages of those who remain on the job, the churches are particularly active in deluding the workers. Like all capitalist spokesmen they first did everything possible to keep up the illusion of prosperity and to deny that any depression existed. Some declared that it was a "sin" if starving, penniless workers did not "stem the crisis" by participating in "Buy Now" campaigns. A Methodist minister in New York distributed widely in January, 1931, a poem entitled, "Cheer Up Now," containing such drivel as "Rebuke ranting rebellion," "Preserve pellucid patience," "Out speak overt optimism." A joint pronouncement of the Catholic Cardinals, Archbishops, and Bishops in the United States ascribed unemployment to "lack of good will," to "neglect of Christ," and urged as a remedy a "change of heart." Workers who stand in Salvation Army bread lines find posters staring at them declaring "Business Depressions Are Caused by Dissipation, Dishonesty, Disobedience to God's Will; a General Collapse of

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Moral Character." A situation due entirely to the conditions of capitalist production is attributed to the evil character of men. Other churchmen are using the unemployment crisis to try to lower the living standards of the workers. A prominent Protestant clergy man vigorously declared: "Unemployment will cease when people are converted to a belief in the Incarnate Christ, when they will surrender themselves to him and they will be willing to do without a great many things which they are now striving for." An other clergyman rejoiced that "the arrogance of labor will be humbled."

The main contributions of the churches to an unemployment crisis are prayers and charity. Prayers, of course, provide neither bread nor jobs, But they serve the purpose among church-going workers of turning attention and bitterness away from the real cause of their suffering-the capitalist system-and make it appear that change is only in the "power of god." This faith in the supernatural tends to prevent the workers from organizing to take matters in their own hands, to do away with these periodic crises that are characteristic of capitalism. It delays their recognition of the fact that the struggle against poverty and unemployment is one of class against class, that they must fight for better conditions, and that fundamental changes must be made and capitalism overthrown before these crises can be eliminated.

The churches have appealed for funds in employers' charity campaigns, because they realized that charity is a safety-valve against discontent and that it checks revolutionary struggle. By dispensing even a meager and limited relief, by giving the workers crumbs, they strive to keep them from responding to those who really have their interests at heart. By requiring church attendance of families receiving charity the church's attempt to bring more workers under their influence. In church missions unemployed workers must attend prayer meetings before they are given handouts or beds. When poor tenants are evicted for non-payment of rent and when unemployed workers are imprisoned on charges of vagrancy, the church is unconcerned. A few church "liberals" have urged mild reforms to tone down the resentment of the workers which may lead to militant action. One church group advocates the stagger system of employment which would result in making the workers who are not yet unemployed bear the brunt of the crisis by dividing their work time with others and reducing their pay below an already meager wage. An employers' point of view dominates every statement of the churchmen.

## The Churches in Strikes

Churches can always be expected to take the side of the employers against the workers during strikes. For. money speaks. The employers give the property, build the churches, hire the ministers, pay their salaries, and take care of other church expenses. They dominate the churches and the clergymen completely and use them as they do the schools and school teachers to develop loyalty to the capitalist class. The zeal of clergymen in defeating strikes is, however, usually more than that of persons who recognize that they must act in a certain way to retain their jobs. They thoroughly identify themselves with the capitalist class against the workers.

During the textile strike in Lawrence, Mass., led by the I. W. W. in 1912, church members paraded against the strikers with placards reading, "For God and for Country-the Stars and Stripes Forever-the Red Flag Never." In the great steel strike, led by William Z. Foster in 1919, not one prominent minister in the steel region spoke out in favor of the strikers, while many used as sermons the prepared publicity material of the companies and brought pressure to bear upon the workers to desert the strike. The churches' betrayal of the masses was so obvious that after the strike the Interchurch World Movement led by church "liberals," to retain the church's hold upon the masses, published a report revealing the conditions that led to the strike. This was promptly repudiated by the large church bodies who withdrew from the organization causing it to collapse and showing more clearly than ever the control of the capitalists over the churches. Another larger report, openly supporting the employers, was then issued, endorsed by churchmen, denouncing the first report as being financed by Soviet gold.

On the day the Seattle general strike was called in 1919, one hundred church delegates in convention in Seattle, in their attempt to stir up sentiment against the strikers, issued a statement resolving that the church "deplores the spirit of strike and confusion; that it commends to all men the solution of all social problems by the simple application of the principles enunciated by, and of the spirit of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ." Before and during the strike the churches did everything in their power to break the militant spirit of the workers by urging their members not to participate. They violently denounced the leaders of the

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strike as being in the pay of Moscow. During the many miners' strikes in Pennsylvania and Illinois, leaders of the strikers also had to meet the strenuous opposition of the priests and Protestant ministers who acted as strike-breaking agents, imploring the workers to return to the pits at reduced wages.

The Passaic strike in 1926 again illustrates the insidious role of the churches. Organizers found the local churchmen almost unanimously lined up against them, using their influence especially over the foreign-born to break the strike. The church "liberals" who came in to give some support to the strike actually directed their efforts toward arriving at a compromise through arbitration. Their plea was for the classes to come together "in conference," a procedure typical of "liberal" church agencies. In order to counteract the influence of the radical strike leaders in Passaic, the Department of Christian Social Service of the Episcopal church supported, by a large money contribution, a special propaganda campaign after the strike conducted by an ex-minister who later was put on the payroll of the American Federation of Labor.

In the textile strikes of the South, the hostility of the churches toward the workers has been most intense. Everywhere in the cotton mill towns such as Gastonia, Marion, and Bessemer City, N. C., local churches were active in undermining the fighting spirit of the strikers. In Gastonia, the churchmen incited hostility against the strikers among the more backward elements of the workers to break their ranks in their fight against the mill owners. They helped the employers to stir up mob hatred against the strikers which culminated in the killing of Ella May Wiggins, an active union worker and mother of five. In Marion, N. C., and Danville, Va., where the strikes were under conservative leadership, local churches were nevertheless rabid against the strikers. In Marion they attempted to force the desertion of 100 strikers by dropping them from church membership. In both instances, outside "liberal" church agencies entered and furnished strike relief to allay discontent. They raised funds for this relief from among capitalists on the grounds that they were preventing violence and keeping the workers orderly. In the most recent strike of the textile workers in Lawrence, in February, 1931, when 20,000 workers under the leadership of the National Textile Workers' Union, tied up the plants of the American Woolen Co. in a struggle against an "efficiency" system which meant greater speed-up for the workers, a Catholic priest called upon the strikers, the large majority of whom were Catholics, to meet in conference with him and

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come to terms with the employers. Resolutions against the strike were also passed by a body of Protestant ministers. In cooperation with a "citizens' committee" and the American Woolen Co., the priest carried on an energetic campaign with the slogans: "Labor and capital must get together," "Go back to work," "The American Woolen Co. is honest." When the strikers voted to refuse the invitation to a conference, the churches acquiesced in the campaign of terror unleashed against the strikers by the police, city and federal government, which resulted in the arrest and deportation proceedings against the strike leaders, the raiding of the union offices and intimidation and brutality against the strikers. Church bells were rung when the workers went back to work. Weeks after the strike, outside "liberal" church agencies protested against the police terror in an effort to save the reputation of the church among the workers.

When "liberal" churchmen enter a strike situation they aim to curb the militancy of the strikers by encouraging a spirit of compromise and arousing false hopes of a favorable settlement. At a time when workers are on strike because of the intolerable conditions under which they must work, these clergymen declare that the employers are their friends, that there is no class struggle, and that "mutual interests" should lead to compromise.

Just as the churches participate in strike activity against the workers directly and indirectly, so too have they functioned in other phases of the class struggle. When the I. W. W. protected their hall in Centralia, Wash., and defended themselves against the assault of the American legion mob instigated by the lumber barons, and were put on trial for the death of four of their attackers, the clergymen of Washington helped to whip up hysteria against them. The First Christian Church of Centralia and its minister contributed toward the funds for the prosecution of the men. Eleven years after the event a joint investigation to determine whether "justice" had been done in the case was undertaken by leading church groups which failed to make positive recommendations for the release of the workers.

Only after 15 years had passed did a hundred ministers issue a typically weak statement asking for the release of Mooney and Billings. The churches have been absolutely silent in the case of Frank Spector and other organizers who are imprisoned by the powerful fruit

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growers' interests of California, because they attempted to organize the miserably exploited Mexican agricultural workers of the Imperial Valley. The vast majority of churchmen asked for the death of Sacco and Vanzetti and when on August 24, 1930, Communist speakers were arrested on Boston Common for attempting to hold a Sacco-Vanzetti memorial meeting, a Catholic Truth Guild speaker, permitted by the police to address the crowd, declared, "Whenever these Reds start action in this country they will find the Catholics in the front ranks opposing them."

### The Christian Socialists

The group most active in covering up the role of the churches as aids to capitalism are the so-called Christian Socialists. Sherwood Eddy recently struck the keynote of this group when he said, "If we do not Christianize the social order there are those who will communize it." The appeals of Ludlow, Maurice, and Kingsley, the founders of the Christian Socialist movement in England in 1848 were similar. They urged that Socialism "must be Christianized or it will shake Christianity to its foundations." They helped to defeat the militant Chartist movement during the forties when the workers fought to obtain the right to vote, previously restricted to the propertied classes in England.

Christian Socialists have come with pleas for "inward reforms" as against fundamental political changes. When workers begin to recognize the true nature of the class struggle, Christian Socialists begin to propagandize them for "Christian fellowship," for "a better understanding between the classes," and for "a study of the question in the light of Christian principles." Many of their statements in industrial crises are so phrased as to solicit the friendship of the workers but in every instance the underlying message is one of conciliation, non-violence, and surrender. Christian Socialists are always upholders of religion rather than defenders of militant workers. John Haynes Holmes, Reinhold Niebuhr, Harry Emerson Fosdick (Rockefeller's pet preacher), Jerome Davis, and Francis J. McConnell are typical. Holmes claims to have become a Socialist in 1910 when he read that Socialism was the "economics of Christianity." He is against strikes and declares they are not "justified," contending that "their methods are detestable to every enlightened and compassionate soul."

These Christian Socialists and pacifists are merely advocating a "Back to Jesus" movement, when they criticise capitalists and preach

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against the "profit motive." They create a false picture of early Christianity as an ideal religion after which present religion should be modeled rather than being rejected entirely. The workers' plight is piously considered "deplorable," "a disgrace to a Christian country." Employers are expected graciously to change their tactics, to stop underpaying workers, to refrain from competing with fellow capitalists when they realize that these practices are not according to "Christian ethics." The function of the church is thought to be to convince the erring capitalists that unless they quit being brutal and accept social reforms they will bring on revolution. At the same time workers are urged to cooperate with capitalists in terms of "Christian brotherhood" and non-violence. Militant action by workers to achieve their ends is condemned as "anti-social" and destructive and the class struggle is denied.

Christian Socialism is, then, in its actual effect, counter-revolutionary. It's reformism attempts to check rebellion among workers. Its main purpose is to put the brakes on aggressive action by the workers and to save them for the church by having them believe that the church is on their side.

The Reverend Norman Thomas (Presbyterian) and the Reverend A. J. Muste (Quaker) belong to this group of Christian Socialists. Their phrases are often radical, but whenever they set forth their objectives at length they reveal their true purpose.

"Peaceful unionization now is the only alternative of bitter revolt in the future," wrote Thomas in a letter appealing for funds for the relief of the Danville strikers in 193 r. He deceives many workers into believing that partial reform measures are steps toward Socialism. The Socialist Party under his leadership co operates with the so-called liberal church groups in activities calculated to prevent workers from resorting to revolutionary action. Another leader of the Socialist Party declared after hearing the pope's recent radio message on labor: "There is nothing inconsistent between Socialism and Catholicism or any other organised religion. We welcome the pope's conversion to our doctrine of labor ..."

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### Catholicism on the Economic Front

The Catholic church defends private property very violently against Communism. In the thirteenth century, during the Peasants' Revolts, St. Thomas Aquinas wrote a tract which the church still endorses, in which he stated that the doctrine of early Christian communism was all right for paradise but that private property must be defended on earth as a "necessity for weak human nature corrupted by the Fall of Man." Pope Leo XIII in 1891 issued the encyclical known as *Rerum Novarum* discussing the relations between capital and labor. It is the guide to action for the Catholic churches at present. He declared it to be the duty of the state to repress those who want to change the economic system which sacrifices the welfare of the masses to the profits of the few. He said:

(The primary purpose of the state is) the safeguarding by legal enactment and policy, of private property. Most of all it is essential in these times of covetous greed, to keep the multitude within the line of duty. Neither justice nor the common good allows any one under the pretext of futile and ridiculous equality to lay hands on other people's fortunes. There are not a few who are imbued with bad principles and are anxious for revolutionary change.

The authority of the state should intervene to put restraint upon these disturbers.

*Rerum Novarum* was recently elaborated upon by the present pope Pius XI with much fanfare and publicity. Widely acclaimed in the capitalist press, it may be considered as representative of the position of all the churches toward the workers. The pope's encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, presented under the guise of friendliness to the workers, urges them to accept their status, maintaining that the existing social classes are wise and god-given. In spite of the fact that in the Soviet Union, the capitalist class has been overthrown and the rule of the workers established, he declares that classes cannot be changed and that the worker must reconcile himself to his present lot in life:

The differences in social conditions in the human family which were wisely decreed by the Creator, must not and cannot ever be abolished.

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All opposition between the classes must cease and harmonious collaboration must be established between the various groups.

All must work together, therefore, for the common good in complete harmony and discipline, each at his own post and in his own sphere, seeking only the interests of good and the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

While vaguely and hypocritically suggesting that the workers should receive wages "to satisfy the legitimate requirements of an honest working man", the pope warned the workers against struggle to get such wages, as if the employers will give them voluntarily. The above utterances of the pope are designed to encourage humility, subservience and non-resistance on the part of the workers. His slogans: "prayer, action, sacrifice" were also aimed to promote such attitudes. Prayer was defined as an "expression of the greatest faith"; action, promotion "of the peace of Christ among the classes" and sacrifice, "perseverance, method and discipline in your work, which demand the submission of your personal ideas and also demand your coordination and your subordination as workers."

While condemning "men for fixing their eyes on earthly goods", the pope demanded, on the same day as the delivery of his radio message, cash reparations of \$30,000,000 from the government of Spain for church property destroyed by revolutionary masses who were protesting against the churches which had amassed their wealth at the expense of the workers.

The pope recognized that since the time that *Rerum Novarum* was issued, what was then called Socialism, has divided into two groups, the Socialists and the Communists. He declared correctly that Socialism "has notably mitigated its program. It has approached, now more, now less, so close to Catholic-Socialist principles that some are asking themselves whether now the divergence is not one of name only." Of Communism he states: "its teachings can in no wise be reconciled with the doctrines of the Church", knowing as he does that Communists are fighting religious superstitions, are advocating the application of scientific and rational principles to society, and are determined to overthrow the capitalist class of which the churches are agents.

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Following the principles set down in *Rerum Novarum*, the pope endorsed the christian labor unions which the church had organized in Europe to combat militant labor unions and to split the workers' front against the capitalists.

In the United States, christian labor unions have never been organized because the American Federation of Labor can be depended upon to oppose militant unions. While the A. F. of L. is controlled by reactionary leadership, the Catholic church will probably not organize separate unions here. But as soon as the workers in greater numbers become more revolutionary the church will become active in union work as it did in Europe. In an address during the 1930 American Federation of Labor convention in Boston, Cardinal O'Connell as usual quoted pope Leo's encyclical and called upon capital and labor "to cease their bitter fratricidal strife and come to terms of understanding and cooperation" the typical religious plea of conciliation which in reality means that workers cease fighting and accept the conditions dictated by the employers.

The Catholic church has been one of the reactionary forces supporting the employers against such mild social legislation as the federal child labor amendment, the weak bill for maternity care, and legislation permitting the distribution of birth control information among the masses in the United States.

At present the Catholic church is active through the National Catholic Welfare Conference whose executive secretary is John R. Ryan. In July, 1930, he was given special instructions by the pope to "beware lest Bolshevism spread in America at this moment of financial depression and unemployment." This has always been the guiding principle of Ryan's work. "Justice to the working man" has been a slogan to keep workers under the church's domination and to prevent them from participating actively in a movement that has for its aim the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a government that serves the interests of the masses.

### **The Synagogue**

Just as each of the christian sects hypocritically claims to be friendly to labor so many Jewish leaders maintain that Judaism stands for "social justice" for the workers. They point to passages in the Old Testament and in Jewish lore which protest against injustice. But watch

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the synagogues in action. Like the churches they are built and maintained by the propertied classes to preserve established moral standards and loyalties to the existing system. Both the conservative orthodox and modern reform synagogues offer prayers for those in authority. The orthodox synagogues divert the attention of the Jewish workers from their participation in the struggle to change the institutions which oppress them, by attempting to make them slavish followers of Jewish doctrine, ritual, and tradition. The synagogues foster group loyalty among workers, which serves to obscure class consciousness. The synagogues have played no part in fighting sweatshop conditions in the needle trades where Jews have predominated or in bettering the notorious working conditions in the department stores, numbers of which are controlled by Jews. Rabbis fear to criticize any aspect of capitalism. They justify their cowardice by claiming that they do not want to stir up anti-semitism. In the face of class conflict they support those who pay their salaries.

Reform Judaism is a small upper middle-class sect. It promotes bourgeois standards and complacent acceptance of the present system. A small group of reform rabbis, ashamed of being merely fawners to the rich of their congregations, assume the role of social reformers and cooperate with other "liberal" church bodies. They have formulated a reformist "social justice" program. The large majority of reform rabbis, although formally endorsing the program, give no publicity to this futile scrap of paper. The synagogue stresses the giving of charity to the poor, an act which salves the conscience of the giver-who has built his wealth by taking it from the workers-establishes his prestige as a philanthropist, and at the same time serves the function of checking the resentment of the workers.

Rabbi Stephen Wise of New York City occasionally intervenes to demand that the bosses arbitrate labor disputes. He has stated repeatedly that his chief objective in so doing is to avoid the spread of Communism and to prevent "labor unrest." He wants to refine the methods of capitalism so that it can maintain itself more effectively.

### **The Church and the Negro Workers**

Negro workers in the United States have been most victimized by

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religion. As a southern Negro work song expresses it:

While nigger, he busy, wit' Bible and pray  
White folks dey's stealing de whole. Eart' 'way. White folks use whip,  
white folks use trigger. But 'twere Bible an' Jesus made slave of the nigger.

Negroes would still be legal slaves if the churches had had their way. In 1845 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church declared that it could not demand the release of slaves by its members "without contradicting some of the plainest declarations of the word of God. The Assembly cannot therefore denounce the holding of slaves as necessarily heinous and scandalous sin and calculated to bring on the Church of Christ the curse of God, without charging the Apostles of Christ with conniving at sin." Over a hundred ministers of all faiths in the South published in 1863 a statement which read:

We consider Abolitionism as an interference with the designs of Divine Providence. It does not possess the signs of the Lord's blessing. We declare in the sight of God that the relation of master and slave, much as we deplore abuses in this as in other human institutions, is not incompatible with our faith.

When the Negroes were "freed" over the protest of the churches, the latter continued their efforts to enslave the Negroes by keeping them in ignorance and through teaching them submission and servility. The Negro churches of the North and South alike are financed chiefly by funds of white landowners and industrialists who wish to "keep the Negro in his place." Denied cultural and social equality and deprived of educational opportunities, the Negroes find in the churches their means of self expression. The high emotionalism of the Negro churches is encouraged by the whites to offer a release that would otherwise take the form of revolt against the disgraceful conditions under which Negroes are forced to work and live. The Ku Klux Klan is financed by Protestant capitalists who wish to keep the Negroes economically and culturally degraded. It is led by Baptist and Methodist clergymen. Participants in the lynching parties are usually "respectable" church members.

The churches are active in maintaining all the discriminations against Negroes, the Jim Crow laws, and other restrictions. The delegates at a meeting of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America in 1929 rejected a proposal offered by its Commission on Social Service

recommending "the removal of discriminations which prevent equal opportunity of development for all races and for the equal sharing of rights and privileges." Racial equality for the Negroes is abhorrent to the vast majority of white churchmen. When the Communist Party went into the South organizing Negro and white workers together and demanding full economic, political, and social equality for Negroes, the southern churches incited mob violence against its organizers. Negro ministers joined in the attack, advising the Negroes to "wait patiently for the Lord" to help them, and proclaiming the fine virtues of their white masters. The southern churches have succeeded in keeping the Negroes virtually in slavery which they would have prolonged legally had they had the power.

### **The Church as an Imperialist Agent**

The church reciprocates for the support of the state by valiant service in the interests of imperialism. During the last imperialist war churches created hatreds and passions and urged men to go out to die "for Ch\_rist and country", to fight "the battle of the Lord." They blessed flags; held patriotic services; stirred up venom among workers to slaughter workers in other lands, to protect and expand the markets of the capitalists. Clergymen, exempt from military service because of the greater assistance they could give the government as recruiting agents, participated directly and indirectly in the promotion of the war hysteria and in the drives that financed the war. The extreme war spirit of the religious bodies was typified in a Y.M.C.A. manual which instructed the soldiers: "Never miss an opportunity to destroy the eyes of the enemy....•The eyes can easily be removed with the finger." Protestant bibles were distributed to the soldiers with the inscription of President Wilson reading, "The Bible is the word of God. I request you to read it." The Catholics distributed their own version of the New Testament containing a foreword by Cardinal Gibbons which shows how closely the church is tied up with the capitalist state:

Called to the service of your country, love for its soil and for its people must necessarily be the mainspring of all your military activities. In these respects Christ our Lord is your example.

Your first and important duty is prompt and cheerful obedience to the commands of your superiors. The sanction for it is found in these

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words in the New Testament: "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers for there is no power but from God, and those that are ordained of God.

Catholics, through the Knights of Columbus, Protestants through the Y.M.C.A., and Jews through the Jewish Welfare Board, tried to keep the spirits of the soldiers high as they were being prepared for slaughter. The churches functioned also to salve the pain of the relatives of the victims of the war by fervid sermons on the glory of martyrdom and the beauties of immortality. Protests of the suffering were soothed and given emotional release by prayer, preventing resentment against the war.

Synagogues, orthodox and reform, participated in the war mania and became super-patriotic. The Jewish Publication Society which had carried a seal on the binding of its books reading, "Israel's Mission is Peace," effaced it.

The churches have always participated in imperialist ventures to extend capitalist markets. In the United States, since the time when the Puritans first fell on their knees (and then on the aborigines!) the churches have supported the state in aggressive exploitation of the American Indians. The Board of the American Baptist Home Missionary Society received gifts of \$485,000 securities, belonging to the Indians of Oklahoma, from Commissioner Burke of the U. S. Bureau of Indian affairs, as a reward for its active work in assisting in defrauding the Indians of their land.

When the United States government grabbed the Philippines, the Catholic Archbishop Ireland of St. Paul, Minn., publicly put the church's stamp of approval upon the act. Later the Arch bishop wrote: "McKinley realizes the services I have rendered him."

Missionary societies send their angels of imperialism to open markets for the capitalists in all parts of the world and to prepare the way for the exploitation of the workers. Chinese territory has been annexed by the imperialists as compensation for the death of missionaries who imposed themselves on the natives. Germany, for example, taking advantage of the murder in Shan tung of two German Roman Catholic missionaries in 1895, seized Tsingtau and forced from China a 99-year lease to Kiaochow, including the port of Tsingtau, and exclusive railway and mining concessions in Shantung. After the Boxer

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rebellion in 1900 against the imperialists and their missionary agents, China was looted by foreign armies with the christian missionaries sharing the loot. Indemnities of over 450,000,000 taels in which the Americans shared-a tael is equivalent to 64 cents-were extracted from the Chinese. Missionary claims for indemnity were not presented directly to the Chinese government but through foreign governments which had armies ready to take them. In 1928, Catholics and Protestants spent at least \$15,000,000 for missionary work in China.

Recently, Chiang Kai-shek, his hands still wet with the blood of thousands of Chinese workers, peasants and students, bid for imperialist support against the growing Communist movement in China, by becoming a convert to Christianity. When the missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, a church which shares in the responsibility for the lynching of Negroes in the United States, baptised him, he declared that Chiang "and the spirit of Jesus Christ within him will go marching on" to continue his attacks on the revolutionary Chinese workers. Chiang's conversion was hailed joyfully by Christians in the United States who immediately sought funds to support him in his campaign. The Catholics joined in the hallelujahs. The Commonweal, a Catholic weekly, proclaimed the conversion as a challenge to the Soviet Union.

A letter soliciting funds was sent out in March, 1931, by a New York organization called the China Child Welfare, Inc., supported partly by missionary groups. The Christian Socialist Methodist bishop, Francis J. McConnell, is one of its directors, and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise is a member of its national committee. The letter read in part:

Bolshevism with all its ills and degradation is trying to get the upper hand in China. Help the New Republic of China to build on the teachings of Jesus Christ and away from Bolshevism.

This is the typical appeal of missionary societies and their subsidiary organizations which, through their activities, assist imperialist armies to prevent successful revolutions of the exploited masses.

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### **The State and Religion in the United States**

As the purpose of state power in capitalist countries is to preserve capitalism, it is not surprising to find the state directing all its efforts to the perpetuation of agencies like the church that strengthen the hold of capitalists over their workers. When Peter Bogdanov, Chairman of the Amtorg Trading Corporation, a Soviet Union commercial agency, appeared as witness before the Fish Committee which was investigating Communist activities in the United States, he refused to take the religious oath. Asked by Representative Nelson whether he belonged to any sect, he answered that he thought religion in the United States had no connection with state matters. Nelson replied, "Understand that religion does have a place in this country and in our courts of law." This is a correct and frank statement of the fact that all the propaganda that there is religious freedom in the United States is utterly false. Judicial decisions have definitely and repeatedly declared this country to be a "Christian country" and have been outspoken in their recognition of the aid which religion offers established institutions. Note the following typical decision:

The same reasons of state policy which induced the government to aid institutions of charity and seminaries of instruction will incline it to foster religious worship and religious institutions as the conservators of public morals and valuable if not indispensable assistants in the preservation of public order. (First M.E. Church So. v. Atlanta 76 Ga. 181:

Atheists, and even those who believe in God but do not believe in immortality, are discriminated against in the courts of many states. In the famous Gastonia, N. C., textile strike when seven Communist strike leaders were tried for murder after the death of the chief of police who had led an unprovoked attack on the workers' headquarters, a defense witness was impeached because she did not believe in a "supreme being who punishes you for your wrongdoing and rewards you for virtues." The decision based on a statute passed in 1777 which requires a witness to believe in divine punishment after death, was later upheld by the Supreme Court of North Carolina. Soon after this a judge in New Jersey disqualified a Communist as a witness because he denied belief in god. Maryland requires as a qualification both of witnesses and jurors that they believe in "the existence of God and that under his dispensation such person will be held morally accountable for his acts and be rewarded or punished therefore in this world or the world to come." In New Hampshire a "person

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who openly avowed that he had no belief in God" cannot be admitted to testify in court. This is also true in Illinois, Arkansas, and Delaware. In the Federal courts, also, witnesses have been disqualified who have not believed in a god who punishes and rewards. It is still being debated whether under Federal practice non-believers in a state that discriminates against them may apply for a patent, trade-mark, copyright or passport. In the face of these discriminatory laws, there is, of course, no religious freedom in the United States. Religious freedom means at most the freedom to choose a brand of religion-it does not mean freedom for the non-believer.

The oath is not the only instance of religious discrimination. There are blasphemy laws in a large number of states which have been used against militant workers as in the case of Anthony Bimba, who was arrested on a charge of blasphemy in 1926 when he was addressing a meeting in Brockton, Mass. In many states workers are prevented from enjoying their only day of rest by Blue Laws enforced through the power of christian fundamentalists.

States help support the churches by exempting church property from taxation. In many states, children must listen to the reading of the bible daily in the public schools and in some states to daily prayers. In several states where the churches control the legislatures, the teaching of evolution is forbidden in the public schools. Churches are permitted to maintain parochial schools whose primary purpose is to inculcate religion in the workers' children. Protestants, Catholics, and Jews have recently united to have legislation passed setting aside a part of the school day to the various church bodies for religious teaching. In fact, the primary purpose of the much heralded "cooperation of faiths," has been to intensify the reactionary campaign against atheists and non-believers and to strengthen the hold of the churches over the minds of the masses. A movement is now on, led by the Reformed Presbyterian church, to incorporate into the U. S. Constitution the name of god and for the constitutional recognition of Christianity as a national religion.

### **The Church and the Soviet Union**

In the United States, as in all capitalist countries, the churches, by developing law-abiding attitudes through their appeal to fear of an

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avenging god, become part of the repressive apparatus, equally with the police, the army, and the prisons, for the purpose of attempting to prevent rebellion and keep the masses in subjection. As Lenin once said: "All oppressing classes need two social functions to safeguard their domination: the function of the hangman and the function of the priest." On the other hand, the Soviet Union under a workers' and peasants' government, is the only country in the world where religion and the churches are being combated with the active cooperation of the government.

The capitalist press of the world has spread false propaganda - about the anti-religious work of the Soviet Union. When considering the relation of the Soviet government to the churches, it must be remembered that the 400,000 priests and monks of the Russian churches were active counter-revolutionary agents before and during the revolution, supporting the Tsar and the anti-Soviet armies against the revolutionary workers. During the great famine of 1921, when the peasants were dying from hunger, the churches refused to contribute from their enormous resources for food and medicine in the hope that the famine would lead to the downfall of the Soviets.

But the conflict has deeper roots. For the Soviet government has for its prime objective the fullest possible development of the masses, and the churches have been the bulwarks of reaction and ignorance. As militant materialists the Soviet leaders are uncompromising in their scientific and atheistic position. They have met the attack of the churches by teaching the illiterate masses to read and write, by offering them opportunities for culture and recreation, by training them to know and to make use of the contributions of science. Russians who were awed, cowed, and terror-stricken in pre-revolutionary days by ignorant priests and their supernaturalism and magic are responding with alacrity to the enlightenment campaign of the government. They find the fertilizers and tractors provided by the government far more effective means of obtaining a good crop than the prayers for rain by the priests upon which they formerly depended. Rows of icons are being supplanted with bookshelves and holy candles with radio tubes. As a result, the churches, although permitted to function in the Soviet Union without direct interference, find their congregations diminishing rapidly. At the request of the workers, church buildings are being transformed into schools, museums and workers' clubs.

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The churches formerly gained their tenacious hold upon the masses by their indoctrination of the youth. They impressed these immature minds with the supposed horrible consequences of disbelief and in this way held sway over them later in life. For this reason, the Soviet government has prohibited the teaching of religion to children until they are old enough to have critical judgment. The fear of the supernatural having been dispelled through scientific education, few people upon attaining adulthood now join the churches. As a result church membership is largely confined to old people, unable to adapt themselves to the new life and to free themselves from their superstitions. As the churches get no financial help from the government and compulsory collections for the benefit of the churches are prohibited, the wealth of the churches is not being replenished except by voluntary contributions from their meager membership. They are dwindling decrepit vestiges of a defeated society. In emancipating the workers the new society has placed the Catholic priests, Protestant, Jewish, and Mohammedan clergymen, in their proper category, with the medicine-men of primitive peoples.

As the anti-religious campaign in the Soviet Union succeeds, the religious forces of the world are organizing and supporting interventionist movements to destroy the workers' state. When the Soviet Union in 1930 was extending its collectivist program among the peasants, many of whom were being stirred up to rabid opposition by the priests, who were in league with the rich kulaks, the pope declared a holy crusade on the Soviets in which Protestant and Jewish leaders joined. Imperialists made good use of their agents to prepare sentiment for war. Interventionist plans failed, but agitation by the churches continues to lay the basis for an attack upon the workers' government. Recently, the pope ordered that prayers against the Soviet Union must be said daily by priests and people together after every mass. The churches recognize that their existence is threatened by a workers' government whose purpose it is to enlighten and emancipate the masses, and they are using their great wealth and power in an attempt to destroy it.

### **Combatting Religion**

Many individuals and groups are warring on the reactionary teachings of the churches. Some of these are merely seeking to bring religion up to date in the hope that it may survive. They are no less

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active than other churchmen in directing attention away from the realities of the class struggle and in trying to give workers the illusion of happiness in the midst of poverty.

Religion can not be reformed. Whatever its doctrine and ritual, it remains an agency by which the capitalist class enforces its control. The program of those who want to reform existing religion must, therefore, be rejected.

There are those who speak vaguely in terms of "freethought" and "rationalism." They resent the anti-scientific tyranny of the churches but ignore the more dangerous activity of the churches in keeping the masses docile and subservient to the ruling class. They devote most of their energies to showing the contradictions in the bible and the church's opposition to the spread of science and its perpetuation of superstition. But this propaganda against religion fails to get at the root of the power of the churches which is in the oppression, of the masses under capitalism: Lenin has effectively criticized the work of these rationalists and bourgeois atheists:

The fight against religion must not be confined to abstract preaching. The fight must be linked up with the concrete practical class movement directed toward eradicating the social roots of religion. The roots of religion today are to be found in the social oppression of the masses, in their apparently complete helplessness in the face of the blind forces of capitalism which every day and every hour cause a thousand times more horrible pain and suffering to the workers than disasters like wars and earthquakes.

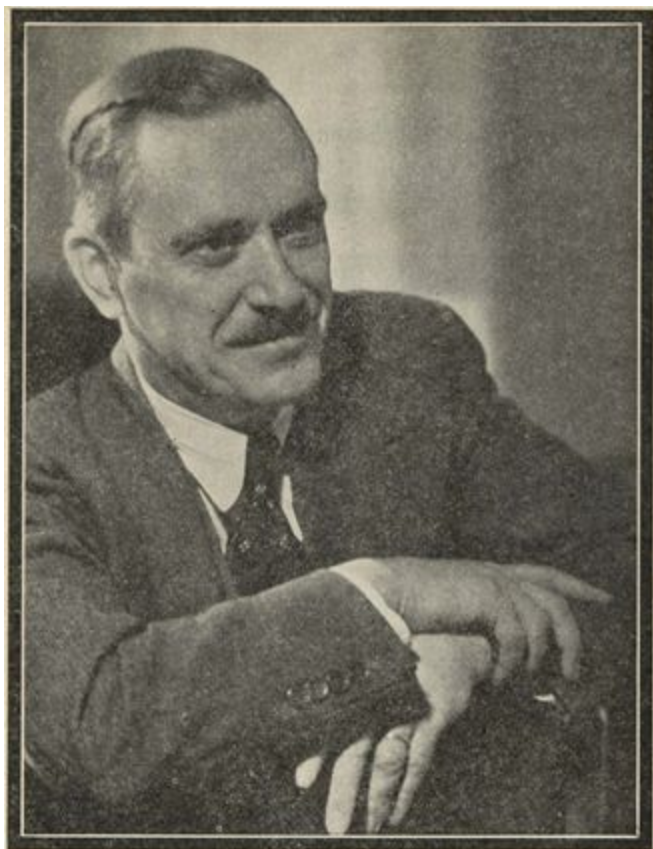
No educational books will obliterate religion from the minds of those condemned to the hard labor of capitalism, until they themselves learn to fight in a united, organized, systematic, and conscious manner the roots of religion, the domination of capitalism in all its forms.

It is necessary to link the fight against the church and religion with the fight against capitalism and imperialism. As long as capitalism exists, religion and the churches will be used for the ends of the capitalist class. Many workers suffering from exploitation will resort to prayer and other forms of church magic in the hope of escaping from their misery. Workers who seek the church because of despair must recognize that in

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this way they are merely having their economic chains tied about them more closely. Prayer will not change their condition. To do so they must join the revolutionary trade unions under the leadership of the Trade Union Unity League, and other mass workers' organizations which are struggling against capitalist exploitation and for the establishment of workers' rule.

In order to counteract the appeal of the churches as "community centers" offering workers recreation as a lure, workers must organize their own social and cultural activities. Already they are leaving the churches in large numbers and are developing workers' educational activities, dramatic and musical societies and sports organizations. Trade unions and other labor organizations must provide centers for cultural activities and must enliven their programs with drama and music to destroy the dependence of workers and their families on the churches for their social life. A militant workers' anti-religious movement must be organized under the leadership of workers who have already freed themselves from church influences, which will have for its purpose the emancipation of the masses from religious domination. This movement, already popular in many European countries, must be closely allied to other militant workers' organizations. In this way, workers now misled by the churches will become active fighters for a new order in which they will use their own power and scientific knowledge to build a new society in which they shall receive the full fruits of their toil.



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## Religion & Communism by EARL BROWDER

*The following is the text of the address of Earl Browder, General Secretary of the Communist Party, U.S.A., delivered at the regular morning service of the Community Church in Boston on March 5, 1939.*

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HERE is an extensive newspaper campaign being conducted in the United States, designed to unite all persons of religious belief in a common front against Communism and the Communist Party, on the ground that Communism and the Communists threaten to destroy their religions and their religious freedom. I have taken advantage of your kind invitation to address you today , in order to give the Communist view of this question. I am assuming that we occupy at least this common ground, to begin with, that we all agree that both sides of the question should be considered fully before minds are closed and final judgment rendered; that is, I assume that I am not addressing myself to those whose views are already fixed and final, not to be reached by reasonable discussion.

Allow me, first of all, to make a clear definition of the Communist Party attitude to religion. My Party stands for unconditional freedom of religious beliefs and worship, as a matter of principle, for the complete separation of church and state, for the removal of every element of coercion in matters of conscience. That is its fundamental principle in all questions of public, of governmental, policy. Within our Party we place no tests of religion whatever upon our membership, which includes, as a matter of fact today, persons of all shades and tendencies of religious belief, as well as skeptics, agnostics and atheists. The Party reserves the right, in relation to its own members, of calling up for discussion any particular opinions of any kind, religious or otherwise, which involve formulation of policy toward social and political problems, but this can never result in coercion because of the purely voluntary nature of membership in the Party.

This being the Communist position , not a new position but going back to the foundation of our movement in the teachings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels from the middle of the nineteenth century on, the question arises, upon what basis has it been possible for misconception to arise, for the Communists to be pictured as proponents of forcible destruction of religion and religious freedom?

Two facts have served to lend some color of credibility to these charges against us, and to make possible widespread misunderstanding.

First, the repression of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Russian Revolution which founded the first socialist republic of the world under

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the leadership of the Communist Party; second, the insistence of all Marxian philosophical authorities upon the exclusion of every element of the supernatural from the explanation of the world and of man's history, and from the policies which are expected to mold and direct future history-the insistence that these questions must be dealt with as matters of scientific inquiry as rigorously as questions of astronomy, physics, chemistry or biology. Let us, therefore, examine these two facts more in detail, to see if they conflict with the principles of religious freedom.

The Greek Orthodox Church was deeply involved in the Russian Revolution, and suffered from it, first of all because it was a State Church, a political instrument in the hands of the tsarist autocracy, as corrupt, rotten and unspiritual an institution as history records. It was the antithesis of religious freedom, as well as the symbol and instrument of political despotism. Any steps toward freedom, religious or political, on the part of the Russian people, no matter how limited, could only be taken over the ruins of tsarism and the Church which was its unlimited instrument; the role of the Church was summed up in the sinister figure of the Monk Rasputin, who dominated the last years of the reign of Nicholas II. For full documentation of this phase of the problem, no recourse is needed to Communist authorities; the case was fully established by historians of all religions (except of the one under examination), before the socialist revolution of 1917 caused them to lock up their books in forgotten archives, so as not to embarrass the anti-Soviet political fight of the Church, with which they were in agreement.

As a matter of simple historical fact, the disestablishment of the Greek Orthodox Church in Russia, and its elimination from political life, was part of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and not specifically of the socialist revolution, even though it was realized only under the Soviet Republic, as were most of the simplest democratic achievements. But it was an historical task strictly parallel to the disestablishment of the Catholic Church in France, a feature of the bourgeois revolution, and was carried through with much less violence and incidental hardships precisely because it was so long overdue that only the socialist revolution completed it. It was an historical task strictly comparable to that which the United States carried out over the sixty or seventy year period following the Declaration of Independence. It compressed in a few short years for Russia the hundreds of years required for the Reformation in Central and Western Europe, which had left Russia almost untouched.

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It becomes further clear that the struggle against the church was a necessity of the simplest aspirations to political liberty, and not a special item of the socialist or communist program, when we see how today it repeats itself in other lands fighting for democracy and independence, for example, in Spain and Mexico. I know quite well, of course, that all Tories point to the conflict between church and state in Spain and Mexico as signs of Communist influence in those lands, but such propaganda is so obviously untrue that it should not confuse a single educated person. Every period of Spanish history, when its people were striving toward democracy and civilization, saw the church hierarchy (always with honorable exceptions) on the side of reaction; and the repressions of the popular movement always resulted in movements against the church, marked by church burnings and so on.

When the Spanish Republic arose a few years ago, the same struggles set in again, as they had so often in Spanish history; that the Communist Party did not create this struggle is proved by the fact that it was not strong enough, before 1936, to elect a single deputy to the national legislature, and when it did become stronger its influence was consistently a moderating one on the religious issue (not, of course, conciliatory toward the pro-fascist section of the Church hierarchy). Similarly in Mexico, the conflict between church and state has been a permanent one since the 1911 Revolution, and was sharpest in the period before the Communist Party was formed, or while it was a small and persecuted sect. President Cardenas is the first Mexican executive to have the epithet "Communist" flung at him (he has the consolation, if he needs it, of knowing that President Roosevelt suffers at the same time from the same accusation), but he is also the first President since 1911 to have succeeded in softening this conflict considerably without compromising the program of the revolution written into the Mexican Constitution.

And finally, citizens of the United States, before they accuse Communists of being church-burners and persecutors of religion, should study the history of our own country more carefully, for they will find that church burnings and persecutions in this country have occurred, but always on the part of one religious group against another, never as the act of anti religious groups or of Communists.

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An illuminating and valuable book has but recently been issued, *The Protestant Crusade*, by Ray Billington, dealing with the anti-Catholic movement in America in the first half of the nineteenth century, from a pro-Catholic viewpoint, which is sufficient by itself to absolve the Communists from any responsibility for the origin of bigotry or intolerance on the religious question in our country.

So much for the first of the two grounds upon which Communists have been accused of being enemies of religious freedom. Overwhelming evidence proves that all the great struggles between church and state which have been so lightly ascribed to Communist hostility to religion are nothing of the kind; they arose out of the general democratic movement of the people for both political and religious freedom, and characterize the bourgeois-democratic revolution against feudalism and semi-feudal survivals, and that these struggles are carried over into the socialist revolution only there where, and to the extent to which, the bourgeois-democratic revolution was delayed or was incomplete.

Now for the second ground for accusation against us, namely, the insistence of Marxian ideology and philosophy upon the exclusion of the supernatural from the world-view upon which we base our program, the insistence upon an exclusively scientific consideration.

First of all, let me repeat, there is no religious or anti-religious test of membership in the Communist Party, and an increasing number of Party members are active communicants of the various churches, finding in the Party program and activities, as distinct from its background and base of Marxian philosophy, what they themselves describe as "the nearest we can find to applied Christianity." And, indeed, it cannot be denied that Christianity and most other religions have communistic traditions and ethical teachings which can be realized in the modern world only through the program of the Communist Party. Nevertheless, there is a conflict between the Marxian philosophy which is the dominating influence in the intellectual life of the socialist and communist movement, and the distinctly religious, ethical, or philosophical-idealist approach to social and political questions, even when these latter approaches result in the acceptance of the same immediate political program of the Communist Party.

We Communists would be the last to evade this issue, or to belittle its significance. But we insist upon keeping it, insofar as we are able, upon

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its proper plane as a conflict of ideas, which does not necessarily, and should not, result in a conflict between persons who agree upon immediate program while disagreeing upon the intellectual path by which they reached that common point. We are determined not to allow any disputes about the Marxian philosophy to be used by anyone to break the unity of the people in their struggles to realize an immediate, agreed-upon program, whether -that is a simple program of the democratic fn ;mt or even the program of establishing socialism. In fact the highest evidence of the validity of Marxism, in our view, is its effective contribution to the unity of the working class and the toiling masses of the population.

We are not sectarians or dogmatists. We know that there is every likelihood that even when the time comes when the majority of the American people decide to establish socialism according to the program of the Communist Party, the greatest part of that majority will not understand or consciously accept the Marxian philosophy, but will be moved by immediate needs which will be expressed in their minds in religious, ethical, or philosophical-idealist forms of thought.

It would therefore be the extreme of stupidity on our part if we should raise dogmatic barriers between our Party and the great masses who do not understand Marxism, and who will not have t1ie opportunity to understand it for some time to come. And Marxians are not stupid, at least not as a rule. A dogmatic Marxism is, in our understanding, foreign to the whole teaching of Marx and his great successors, Lenin and Stalin, and was what Marx himself had in mind when, on an occasion of being pestered by dogmatists trying to quote him against himself, impatiently declared that he, Marx, was ho Marxian.

No, we are not dogmatists. But neither are we weak-minded opportunists or conciliators, who try to patch up a united movement of the people out of mutually contradictory fragments of ideas or the colorless common-denominator of the rich and multiform popular thought. We use our Marxism as an instrument to discover the effective forces that can and will unite the people in struggle for the needs of their life, despite all differences in ideas, and through such common struggle gradually achieve more and more unity of ideas.

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For it is the essence of our thought, and that is why we are called materialists, that the universe and life come first, and out of it grows the idea, not the other way about; and it is also of the essence of our thought, and that is why we are called dialectical, not mechanical, materialists, that the idea, when it corresponds to reality and is taken possession of by the masses, becomes such a power that can shape, direct and guide the human race to complete freedom, which is the same thing as to say the full realization of its capacities.

With increasing frequency I have the question put to me by religious persons with a communist tendency of thought: why does not the Communist Party drop its Marxism, toward which the churches are hostile, and frankly adopt religion as an approach to the masses, even if only from practical and opportunistic motives. I believe that this question can be answered in such a way that everyone, including the advocates of religion, will understand the impossibility of such a proposal. All that is necessary is to begin to visualize the steps that would be necessary, and what would result from these steps.

These proposals usually come from Christians. They really propose that the Party should adopt Christianity. But if we did, that would immediately exclude the Jews, Mohammedans, and the horde of small non-Christian sects, not to speak of a great mass (the majority of the population in the United States) who profess no religion at all, as well as smaller groups of professed atheists. That would only be to fix arbitrarily a division of the people instead of greater unity.

But then our troubles are only begun. The outstanding characteristic of the Christian community, from the viewpoint of influence upon social groupings, is its schismatic character. The largest of the Christian churches is less than one-third of the total, while the remainder is divided up among a score of Protestant denominations. The Catholics are convinced that all others are but disguised forms of atheism, and all the more dangerous because disguised; while most Protestants continue to look upon the Catholics as idolaters and subjects of a foreign potentate, even when they allow the issue to lie in abeyance. Not even all Methodists have been able to remain in one church, and the same is true of Presbyterians and Baptists, not to mention the lesser denominations.

If the Christian community is so demonstrably unable to unify itself, or even to move in the direction of unity, what reason have we to think

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the adoption of Christianity by the Communists would help to unify the people around our political program?

It is, of course, idle to apply the same test to other faiths, as for example the Jewish. And of course the religious Jewish community would indignantly protest against the Communists endorsing their religion, since the fascists have so terribly revived the cannibalistic anti-Semitism of the Middle Ages, and intensified it, precisely under the completely false identification of the Jewish religion with Communism.

Incomparably larger numbers of people are religious-minded than are scientifically minded, due to the educational defects of our present social system. Yet, while the religious approach to our political problems opens up the doors to schism without end, the strictly scientific approach gives the maximum of unity, and contributes most to realizing the brotherhood of man. There has never yet been found a test of religious faith acceptable to all religious people; but there are such tests for all who agree upon the scientific approach. That is why all sciences, except the social sciences, have largely liquidated opposing schools of thought; while in the social sciences, where there is as yet only the beginning of unity in America, this is only because their scientific possibilities are by and large denied, because to admit them would be to admit the tabooed premises of Marxism or Communism. But scientific thought is a mighty force, which it is very difficult to outlaw, and that is why the Communist Party, comparatively very small indeed, exercises an influence in our country which is quite broad and is expanding rapidly.

By maintaining this scientific approach, while scrupulously refraining from all offense to the religious preconceptions of all men and joining in the guarantee of religious freedom to all, the Communist Party finds the road to the maximum unity and effectiveness of all who agree with the practical program of Communism, and the greatest possibility of cooperation with the broadest progressive and democratic masses who constitute a majority of the population. And our cooperation with the broadest circles, on a minimum program of amelioration of social conditions under capitalism (a minimum program typified by the New Deal), is growing every day. In this process we more and more find ourselves in cooperation with groups united on the basis of their religious beliefs. We welcome this cooperation, and do our best to make it more

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fruitful.

Sometimes there are by-products of this cooperation, which are embarrassing to our friends. I have in mind a recent article in the American Magazine, which set out to prove that the Communist Party was "boring from within" the Protestant churches, with such success that we are supposed to be within sight of a majority influence already. Of course, such fantastic conclusions are reached by the simple process of identifying "Communists" by the same standards Mrs. Dilling used to "expose" the "Communism" of the President, Mrs. Roosevelt and Supreme Court Justice Frankfurter. And you can hardly blame the Communists for this embarrassment, because even if we should remove ourselves entirely from the American scene, Mr. Dies and Mrs. Dilling would only insist all the more that we had merely "gone underground," and would all the more insistently "expose" every serious progressive as a "hidden Communist."

An interesting fact, to offset the fantasies about "Communism" in the Protestant churches, is that we have more communicants of the Catholic Church as members of the Communist Party than of any other denomination. While we make many sympathetic contacts among active Protestants, they seldom become Party members; but among Catholics, the speed with which a sympathetic contact develops into a loyal and active Party man is much greater, and the proportion much higher.

When I asked one of our Catholic Party members to explain the reasons for this to me, he replied that his religious education and discipline had contained a recognition of the reality of the material world, which he found largely lacking in Protestant churches, but which he found compatible with the Marxian dialectical materialism. He considers himself first of all a Catholic but he is intellectually convinced that communism is the inevitable next stage of society, and he believes that if he helps to bring it about he will thereby contribute most effectively to the continuity of his religion. He points out that his Church, despite all difficulties, did learn to adapt itself to capitalism, despite its ties to the old feudal society, and he hopes it will, with less resistance, accept the new society of socialism. His views are at least interesting, and I pass them on to you for what they may be worth. This much I can testify toward their soundness, that in the trade union movement the Communists have found no more harmonious and effective co-workers than among those circles predominantly Catholic. From such facts, you will understand why the Communist Party does not reply in kind to the furious diatribes

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directed against us by the reactionary clergy of the Catholic Church, typified by Father Coughlin and the Rev. Edward Lodge Curran. They are not representative of the Catholic community, and as their links with foreign and native fascism become clearer, they are doomed to repudiation by their own flocks. Meanwhile, there is a valuable by-product to their ravings; inasmuch as they are of such low intellectual caliber, most of their audience are left unsatisfied, but curious to really learn something about this much-talked-of Communism, with the result that the circulation of our literature among Catholics is increasing by leaps and bounds. A growing number of Catholic youth, who are sent to my meetings by Rev. Curran in order to scoff, remain, if not to pray, yet to enter into reasonable discussions from which they almost always emerge with thoughtful visage, minus the cocksure aggressive intolerance with which they were sent.

All these growing friendly contacts between Communists and religious communicants are more than casual and accidental incidents. They are symptoms of deep currents beginning to move among the people. They reflect a deepening uneasiness before the rising menace of fascism within the United States, and alarm before the aggressions of the Berlin-Rome Tokyo axis which are engulfing the world in the second World War. When they witness the alliance of the war-makers marching under the flag of "Anti-Communism," their long-inculcated prejudices against the Communists are undermined, at least to the extent of recognizing that they share a common enemy with the Communists, and that enemy an extremely aggressive one, and dangerous beyond anything hitherto seen in history.

The stressful conditions of all loyal and active communicants of both Catholic and Protestant churches under Hitler, and the cannibalistic pogroms against the Jews, have served to awaken and frighten all intelligent church adherents in the United States. They are no longer able to accept the old formula and ready-made answers of the pre-Hitler time.

They are asking questions, serious ones, and demanding serious answers.

With the fascist powers setting themselves up as the church, violently assimilating into themselves all existing churches, our American

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church members can no longer be satisfied with superficial comparisons with former conflicts between Church and the democratizing states which sought the disestablishment of the church and its removal from politics. Here is something quite different, opposite in fact, something which threatens to turn back the clock of human progress not to the Middle Ages, but to pre-civilization.

With the fascist absolutism, no longer content to oppress in the name of God, but claiming to be God himself, personified in Der Fuehrer, disposing of the fate of whole nations with iron hands and the kick of roughshod military boots, American churchgoers can no longer be frightened by the menace of a few quotations from the philosophical writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin which combat the conception of supernatural influences, in the realm of ideas. Here is something quite different, opposite in fact, something which transforms the whole concept of religion and of God himself into a monstrous military machine, raining death and destruction from the skies upon men, women, and children alike.

That all America is aroused and frightened by this horrible menace is attested by the current rearmament prog:-am now getting under way, and which seems destined to reach colossal dimensions before any relief comes. Does any one doubt whence comes the danger before which America is arming?

Surely the danger does not come from "Godless" Soviet Russia. It has existed for twenty-one years, and not one of its neighbors has ever had cause to fear its armed forces, even if some ruling classes have shivered with fright before its ideas.

The stronger the Soviet Union grows, the more it has been able to prove in deeds its undying devotion to international order, to peace, and to the inviolability of agreements between nations.

No, there can be no doubt in the mind of any intelligent person, even one who is only most superficially informed. The world is being plunged into war by the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo axis, the "Anti-Communist" alliance. There are the enemies of all mankind, of civilization itself. Thence comes the menace to all culture and all freedom, including religious freedom.

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If that is true and who can deny it? What then are we to think of those who continue to shout from the housetops the alarm about the "menace of Communism"? Communism will and can be nothing but what the majority of the people make of it, and if we cannot trust the people then all talk of human liberty has become so much hypocrisy.

And what are we to think of those who, more slyly, talk of the "menace of dictatorships" and lump together Germany, Russia, Italy, and Japan? That is only to make the enemy look more powerful, throw panic among the democratic peoples, and deny to us the natural and inevitable cooperation of a natural and inalienable friend, in the most dangerous moment of world history.

The brutal truth, which needs to be spoken with brutal frankness, is that every public man who agitates today against the Soviet Union is thereby taking the path toward the Berlin Rome-Tokyo axis, toward submission to its plans of world conquest.

The issue is submission or resistance. Can anyone think of resistance, but at the same time wish the United States to bear the burden of such resistance alone? Certainly not, for such ideas are clearly nothing but a disguised form of submission, putting off the decision until the rest of the world has been conquered.

Can anyone think of resistance, and not want among America's friends every power, great and small-but especially great which can be aligned against the war-makers, for peace and international order? Certainly not, for to refuse friends in the face of world cataclysm is only the road of self-destruction, of national suicide.

Can anyone deny that the Soviet Union is a great power. Only those who take their thought is ready-made from the Volkischer Beobachter of Berlin, as an increasing number of Republican spokesmen from Herbert Hoover down are doing. A nation that multiplied its national wealth and income by ten times since 1928, the same period in which even the United States declined in wealth and national income, cannot be described other than as a great power. A nation which occupies the eastern half of Europe and the northern third of Asia, with half the surveyed mineral resources of the world, cannot be described other than as a great power. A nation

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which has raised its general standard of living five-fold in ten years cannot be described other than as a great power. A nation that stands second in wealth and income only to the United States itself cannot be described other than as a great power. This great power, the Soviet Union, has proved in its entire existence that it never broke an agreement, never deserted a friend, never uttered a threat, and never violated a border. In a world of chaos and destruction, a world in which the United States government with the overwhelming support of the people considers it necessary to multiply armaments to guarantee our simple national existence-in such a world, such a great power Offers its friendship and cooperation to the American people and government.

Should America accept, cultivate and cherish such a proffered friendship? Men are speaking in the name of religion and religious freedom to advise us no, to refuse this offer. May I be allowed to point out, to Catholics, Jews, and Protestants, to men and women of all religions and of none, that it was such advice, which was followed in Europe, which raised this Frankenstein that threatens our destruction, and if followed in the United States will destroy us also.

## What Is Communism?

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### #6 Communism and Religion

by **EARL BROWDER**

WE HAVE scores of questions relating to the attitude of the Communist Party toward religion and especially asking how it is possible, in view of our opposition to religion, to enter into a united front with religious organizations. We quote from two typical example :

Is it true that the Communist Party is abandoning its historical struggle against religion, compromising with it and even entering a united front with the church?

Can you explain why the Communist Party permitted the Father Divine movement to participate in the May Day demonstration and thereby open itself to such bitter attacks as those being made by The Forward, The New Leader, The Socialist Call and the Trotskyites?

No, it is not true that the Communists are abandoning the historical struggle against religion. On the contrary, it is only now that we are seriously beginning this struggle where it really counts-that is, among the religious masses themselves. The very means of taking the anti-religious struggle among the religious masses, is what has disquieted our questioners. That is only another sign of the old disease of sectarianism from which American revolutionaries have so long suffered.

It is true that the Communist Party is participating in united-front movements in which religious organizations are taking an ever more active part and, to some degree even, including churches. This is not compromise with religion on our part. Our united front is on burning social issues, mainly the struggle against fascism and war and for the Workers' Unemployment, Old-Age and Social Insurance Bill .(H. R. 2827). How does it come about that religious organizations can be drawn into such united front actions, in spite of the active anti-religious work of the Party?

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Here we reveal one of the deep contradictions among the many which tear apart present-day society. The Communists, estimating religion as "the opiate of the people" and combating it untiringly, do so on the basis of our program of complete and unconditional religious freedom. The rising fascist movement throughout the capitalist world, which more and more presents itself as the only alternative to Communism, before the masses marches under the flag of religion (Hitler's latest speech made a special accusation against the U.S.S.R. as "unchristian"), but has revealed itself before the masses, especially in its Hitler-German example, as the destroyer of all freedom, including religious freedom. As against the anti-religious Communists who fight for religious freedom and the religious fascists who fight to destroy it, it is becoming more and more the tendency of the progressive-minded sections of the religious mass organizations to choose the Communists. They tend to join in the broad united front against fascism and its accompanying accentuation of the war danger, and to be glad that anti-religious Communists are shoulder to shoulder with them in the fight.

Does this united front soften down the anti-religious work of the Communists? No, on the contrary, it has aroused a great interest among religious people as to the Communist position and brought about a tremendous increase in the circulation of our anti religious literature. As a result of this united front development, we can say, for the first time, that we are conducting mass work in this field. True, we are much more careful to avoid offending the religious prejudices, especially among the workers; we try not to be offensive to them, because that would only close their minds to what we have to give them. The abandonment of ineffective, offensive, rude and roughly satirical attacks upon religion, among the religious masses, is a loss for which we can be thankful. When in the Ruhr plebiscite, last January, a united front against Hitler was formed among Catholics, Socialists and Communists, this was a serious achievement for the anti fascist front. Its revolutionary logic was so clear, its value so apparent, that very few critics could speak openly against it. The trouble with it was that it did not include enough Catholic and Socialist workers, that it was still only a beginning.

Here in America, last August, it was the united front of religious youth organizations, together with Socialists and Communists, which defeated the fascist-inspired Viola Ilma, with her Washington support, and turned the American Youth Congress into an inspiring mass movement of the youth throughout the country against war and fascism.

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This Youth Congress movement contains, as its main bulk, the religious organizations of young people. At the same time it is all-inclusive, having furnished the vehicle for the first nationwide unity of Socialists and Communists, in spite of the many difficulties in this respect (only gradually being overcome by the pressure of non-party masses). This movement has drawn millions of youth under its influence.

Who could be so utterly stupid as to suggest that the young Communists should keep themselves "pure" and uncontaminated by association with these religious youth organizations, by withdrawing from this great mass movement? It is the outstanding merit of our Communist youth that they have plunged into the very heart of it.

An interesting feature of the Youth Congress is this, that while there are still some few young socialist leaders who try to exclude the Communists (and who would be delighted if we should isolate ourselves), there are very few with that idea who can speak for the religious youth masses. In fact, most of the religious youth will now fight to a finish to maintain the leading position of the young Communists in the Youth Congress movement. Strange as it may still seem to some people, they like us!

This brings us to the much-debated question of the self-styled "God" of Harlem, Father Divine, the participation of whose followers in the New York May Day roused so much comment.

Most of our critics, who condemn us for association with Divine's followers, are willing, strangely enough, to accept or at least condone the united front with the more respectable, more established, church organizations. But they demand that we Communists should be more discriminating, that we should be careful to associate ourselves only with "good" religious organizations, that we should avoid the "bad" ones, like that of Father Divine. They find something especially outrageous in the fact that Divine's followers locate their God in Harlem instead of in the skies or in his Vicar at Rome! Their sense of decency is shocked when Divine's flock shows its religious enthusiasms in the street! They want us to help discipline the Divine congregation into the mold of the older established church institutions.

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But, dear critics, can you not understand that we Communists are so fundamental in our anti-religious position that we are unable to distinguish between "good" and "bad" religions, because for us they are all bad ?

Can you not understand that, for those who have really rejected religion, the idea of God is unacceptable, quite independent of the supposed geographical location of that mythical being?

No, we find it impossible to make a choice between the object of worship of Father Coughlin on the one hand and the most deluded follower of Father Divine on the other. We do find a difference of values, however, as between various religious organizations, when we come to judge among which it is most important and profitable to carry on our work.

While we try to carry our united-front program among the masses in all these organizations, we can see clearly that this is most important in certain ones. And these most important ones are, precisely, the youth and Negro organizations. That is because here, among the youth and the Negro masses, we find the greatest suffering from the crisis and, therefore, the greatest response to our message of organization and struggle. What church organization has made the most complete mobilization of its members to demonstrate opposition to fascism and war?

Unquestionably, it is that of Father Divine. Other churches could well be proud if they had done as much.

What church has adopted resolutions in support of H. R. 2827 and sent delegations to Washington to register this support before Congress? We would be delighted if a thousand other churches would do it, but so far the Divine church does not have much competition for first place.

Is there any one who can deny that these activities are gradually succeeding in giving a social and political education to the Negro masses who belong to Father Divine's church? Is there anyone who can deny the tremendous importance of this political education in the heart of Harlem, and spreading throughout the country precisely through this united front? And can anyone doubt that the liberation of these masses from slavery to religious superstitions is thus being carried out in the only way possible at this point in their development?

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Some of our correspondents have written to us about the Divine church followers in very contemptuous terms. We want to answer all such critics, in the most explicit terms, that we have nothing whatever in common with their contemptuous attitude. Neither have we anything in common with the fantastic religion of Father Divine, in which we see the characteristic features of all religions. But we most emphatically do have much in common with the masses of Negroes who follow Divine; they are our people, they are suffering, toiling masses, they are our brothers and sisters. We will fight for them, for their interests, and we will do everything possible to draw them into a common struggle with us. We grant them the same right to their religious superstitions that we grant to the Catholic masses, the Jewish religious workers, the members of the multitude of Protestant churches and sects; while we reserve to ourselves the right to oppose all such superstitions, in the most effective ways we can find.

The next question is that posed by a certain churchman, who writes us the following:

I am heartily in sympathy with your objectives, and with your judgment on most current questions, but I am somewhat doubtful about the existence of all these revolutionary qualities that you ascribe to the working class I see the biggest organization of labor, the A.F. of L., consistently lined up with the capitalists on all big questions and sometimes even with the most reactionary capitalists, as in their opposition to the recognition of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, from what I see going on in most of the Protestant Churches, I am inclined to think that the Communist Party will capture the leadership of the churches before it does that of the trade unions.

We Communists would be the last ones to deny the reactionary character of the higher official leadership of the American Federation of Labor. This reactionary leadership, however, does not arise out of, nor base itself upon, the main body of organized workers which it claims to represent. Still less is it representative of the working class as a whole. It is a product on the one hand of the narrow craft interests of the relatively small group of highly skilled or strategically placed workers who, in the pre-crisis and especially in the pre-war period, had purchased a privileged position at the expense of betraying the majority of their

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class brothers. This group is what we Communists designate as the "aristocracy of labor." On the other hand, it is the product of capitalist corruption, fraud and coercion extending over many years, in which the working class had not yet become conscious of its separate interests and of its historic role.

This lack of class-consciousness among the workers in America is evidenced by the lack of any separate political organization of the mass of the working class, by its subordination to the open capitalist political parties. The causes of this political backwardness are to be found in the peculiarities of American historical development. These may be indicated, without going into any great detail, as chiefly the higher tempo of American capitalist development as compared to other countries; its greater breadth and sweep in the conquest of a new continent in which pre capitalist forms were largely absent; the accompanying feature of what is known as "the frontier," that is, over a long period the possibility of dissatisfied workers becoming settlers of new territory with the incorporation of the most active and intelligent of them into the bourgeoisie; the existence in America of a higher degree of civil rights than in most capitalist countries; the extreme heterogeneity of the American working class, as a result of immigration from all over the world; and the higher standard of living, as a result of all these peculiarities, of the American workers as compared with those of Europe over a considerable period-in fact practically up to the present economic crisis.

WHAT reason have we to believe that this political backwardness of the American workers can and will be overcome? We have many and good reasons. These are not weakened by the facts just cited, but on the contrary they are strengthened. The higher were the previous standards of living of the American workers, the greater is the consequent dissatisfaction, awakening and revolt when these workers are suddenly, catastrophically, cast down to the European level as at present. The greater were the democratic rights that existed in the previous period when they did not threaten the capitalist rule, the stronger is the present resistance of the working class when capitalism in America is systematically curtailing and destroying these rights and moving towards fascist dictatorship. The same applies to the effects of the crisis upon increasing strata of the farmers and middle classes. Precisely because the United States was the land of the highest development of capitalism (which is the general explanation of the lateness of the working class awakening to class consciousness) the more rapid will be the speed of its

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development as a conscious independent class force. The problem of revolutionization of the working class is the problem of bringing it to consciousness of its class position and class interests.

In contrast with this, among the middle classes it is precisely the growing consciousness of their intermediate position and the contradictions embodied therein, which gives rise more and more to vacillations, hesitations, indecisiveness.

We have reason, therefore, to expect that, with the sharpening of all social problems caused by the capitalist crisis, the working class more and more will emerge as an independent revolutionary force struggling against capitalism, and more and more understand the necessity to overthrow capitalism. And in fact that is what we do witness going on today.

There is sometimes a certain appearance of truth given to the facetious remark of our churchly friend about middle-class church people being more revolutionarily inclined, at least for the moment and on the surface, than large and significant sections of the workers.

But it would be a great mistake to be misled by such superficial appearances. The slightest probing beneath the surface would show that all of these manifestations of radicalization among the middle classes follow, and are dependent upon, the basic movements and struggles of the wage workers. It would be impossible to witness such significant signs of radicalization as the great student strike against war, the leftward movements in the churches and especially among the church youth, the growing struggles of the farmers, the growing organization and activities among technicians and white-collar workers, etc., except upon the basis of the rising strike movement in the industries: the great solidarity strikes of last year, the historic San Francisco General Strike, the National Textile Strike of half a million workers, the nation-wide struggles of the unemployed and so on.

We have every reason, therefore, to expect the continued, though uneven and spasmodic growth of revolutionary action and leadership among the workers, organized and unorganized, which can end only with the complete victory of the working class.

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On the other hand, much as we welcome and anticipate the expressions of the revolutionary process going on among the churches, we cannot expect an analogous development there. Precisely because the Protestant churches in America have been, to a greater degree than in other countries, removed from direct contact with the social and political struggles as a result of the separation of church and state and of their decentralized and split-up organizations, there has been a certain opportunity for a freer expression through some of them of the revolutionary trends operating among the masses. This will find its limits, however, with the further development of the class struggle. These churches are fundamentally controlled, as organizations, by the capitalist class. Very soon we may expect to see the anti-Red campaign with its Dickstein Committees, its Hearsts and so on, carrying through a purge in these institutions. They can never become basic weapons in the hands of the toiling masses in their struggle for a new society.

The basic and leading force to resist the degradation of living standards by the capitalists is, and can only be, the working class and before all, the industrial wage workers. This is the only class, further, that is capable of conceiving, planning and building a socialist society. In carrying out these historic tasks, however, the working class does not isolate itself from the other sections of the oppressed and impoverished population. On the contrary, it fights for the interests of all the toiling masses, and sets itself to win them in close alliance and active participation in the struggle for immediate needs and for the socialist society. The Proletarian Revolution, towards which the Communist program leads, is in the truest and broadest sense the People's Revolution. Only such a revolution can free humanity from the degradation and bestiality of the final stage of capitalism such as we now witness in Germany, free the stifled productive forces, preserve the cultural heritage of the past from destruction and lead the whole human race towards a brighter and happier future, a future of peace, plenty and prosperity.



APRIL, 1935

# THE COMMUNIST

Forge a Mighty United Front for May Day!

Manifesto of the Central Committee, C.P.U.S.A.

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Our Tasks in the Light of Changed Conditions

MORRIS CHILDS

•

Development of Work in the Harlem Section

JAMES W. FORD and LOUIS SASS

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## Religion and Communism

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By EARL BROWDER

*(Discussion with a Group of Students of the Union Theological, Seminary on the Question of Religion and Communism, Led by Comrade Browder, on February 15, 1935)*

1.      *What is the official position of the Communist Party of the United States on the question of religion?*

The Communist Party takes the position that the social function of religion and religious institutions is to act as an opiate to keep the lower classes passive, to make them accept the bad conditions under which they have to live in the hope of a reward after death. From this estimate of the social role of religion it is quite clear that the Communist Party is the enemy of religion. We Communists try to do the opposite of what we hold religion does. We try to awaken the masses to a realization of the miserable conditions under which they live, to arouse them to revolt against these conditions, and to change these conditions of life now; not to wait for any supposed reward in heaven, but to create a heaven on earth; that is, to get those things which they dream about as good things, to realize them in life. It is clear that any serious movement to rouse and organize the masses to the realization of a better life now, must struggle against anything that tends to create passivity, to create the idea that it is better to submit passively to the powers that be.

On the other hand, the Communist Party is absolutely opposed to any form of coercion on religious matters. Communists are for religious freedom unconditionally. The Communists do not consider religion a private matter when it concerns revolutionists. But they consider that in relation to State power, to governmental policies, religion is a private matter. The State should not interfere with, or in any way dictate to, the religious institutions and beliefs. This explains the seeming paradox that fascism, which puts itself forward as essentially a religious movement, discloses itself in practice as a supreme denial of religious liberty, whereas Communism, which has a negative attitude towards religion, is the only social movement today that releases religion from all artificial

constraints and regulations, from the denial of freedom.

In Germany we have had a very thorough and convincing demonstration of what fascism means for religion and for religious institutions. I do not think that I need to elaborate. I think everybody is familiar with what is going on in Germany. We have an equally thorough example of what Communism means in governmental policy towards religion in the development of more than 17 years of workers' and farmers' government in the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union there is complete religious freedom. At the same time, the Communist Party, which is the government Party, carries on an active anti-religious campaign. This anti-religious campaign is purely educational. The Communists consider it would be the greatest mistake to use coercion in the fight against religion. We consider that this would defeat our own purpose. We consider that the most effective fight against religion, to remove it completely as that social factor which stands in the way of reorganizing society, is precisely the granting and guaranteeing of complete religious freedom. Complete religious freedom, of course, means the complete withdrawal of governmental support of religion and of all special privileges for religious institutions. It also means that the religious education for the young stands on its own feet without any artificial support.

As for the religious workers, the Communist Party does not make the abandonment of their religion a condition of joining the Party, even though it carries on educational work which is anti religious. You may be interested in knowing that we have preachers, preachers active in churches, who are members of the Communist Party. There are churches in the United States where the preachers preach Communism from the pulpits, in a very primitive form, of course. In one particular church service described to me, the substance of the sermon (I do not remember the exact title) was that the Communists were the angels of God that had been sent like Moses to lead the people from the wilderness, while the representatives of the devil were the capitalists and their agents. This, of course, is not an expression of the official Communist attitude on these questions, as you will understand; but we do not expel such people from the Party. The test for us is whether such people represent the social aspirations of the masses, which may take on a religious form, but which are essentially social rebellion. When such is the case, we welcome them into our Party. Even within the Party, where we do not consider

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religion a private matter, we have no sort of coercion towards such religious remnants, even towards their active religious expressions.

2. *Would you say, Mr. Browder, that religion might serve a revolutionary function?*

I would say that revolutionary social movements may sometimes take on a religious form; this form, however, would not be an accelerating factor, but a retarding one. That does not mean that there could not be-and in fact there are to an increasing extent common objectives between the Communists and religious organizations, for which joint efforts and struggle would be put forward. We have seen this in the political field recently in the Saar, where some sections and prominent leaders of the Catholic church, realizing the loss of religious freedom which would be involved by incorporation in the Hitler regime, formed a united front with the Socialists and Communists to fight for the status quo in the Saar. Such concrete joint struggles will develop more and more, in which instances it could be said, from a certain point of view, that the religious movement was serving a revolutionary purpose. There it is not religion as such which serves the revolutionary purpose, but the struggle against oppression, the struggle for the right of the masses to express themselves even in their confused fashion. The struggle for this right is revolutionary, and in that sense religious organizations and movements can play a revolutionary role.

3. *What do you mean by saying religion is not a private matter where revolutionaries are concerned?*

I took it to mean that you would not consider anyone holding a religion to be a revolutionary; yet you said that you accepted religious workers into the Party.

When workers come into the Party still actively religious, we accept them, not because we accept their religion but because we know that the process of discarding religious beliefs, which are in the last analysis reactionary ones, is a more or less protracted one. We expect religion to be eliminated only in the course of a few generations of the new society, the Socialist society.

We do not consider this religious belief a private matter among revolutionaries; for those who join the revolutionary movement will have

to submit all their beliefs to criticism. As members of the revolutionary movement, everything they think and everything they say affects the development of this movement which they have joined and of which they have become a part. While we do not exact of them that they give up their religion, we will subject their religious beliefs to a careful and systematic criticism, and we expect that the religious beliefs will not be able to stand up under such criticism. We would not, for example, place in the most responsible leading positions of the movement people who had strong religious beliefs. We consider that they would be dangerous because they would be left open to social influences which would endanger the direction of the masses they would have in their charge.

4. *On the other hand, since a large ,proportion of the American population is either connected with the church in one form or an other, or even very sympathetic to the church, won't your tactics, in order to win these people over, have to take that into account, pretty thoroughly? That is, are you able to ,present a front against religion in America comparable to that used in Russia when you are working with the American masses?*

Certainly we will have to take the religious beliefs of the masses into account and respect them-and we do. Certainly, the revolution, which will be an act of the majority of the people, will involve these religious beliefs. If religion stands as the absolute barrier to the revolution, that would postpone the revolution for a considerable period. We do not think that it does. We think religious minded people will participate in the revolution, will help to carry through the change. This is in no way a concession in principle to religious ideas. Concessions to the desires and prejudices of masses who hold religious views--yes. The utmost respect for their right to hold these views, by all means. Complete absence of any system of coercion on these questions, by all means. In this form, taking these questions into account and respecting them, do we meet the question, but not with any concessions in principle.

5. *Suppose that the members of this group go out into the various churches that they will serve and that they, together with the people in their congregations, would become revolutionized and would feel that they were being animated by religious motives, would the Communist Party examine that evidence and give it scientific weight, and*

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*possibly modify its conviction that religion cannot be a revolutionary force?*

I would not want to hold out any hopes that the Communists will be converted to religion. For us as Communists the question is answered and, while we always examine all evidence that is brought forward scientifically, we have no reason in our experience to believe that any future evidence will modify our conclusions. We would not want to give the slightest indication that there is any prospect of a rapprochement between Communism and religion as such.

6. *Are you sure there 'Will never be any evidence?*

While we always examine every bit of evidence that comes forward, we consider the question as settled for us. We do not expect to have to reopen it.

7. *Do you distinguish between the religious spirit and religion as it is institutionalized?*

Yes, we do.

8. *Do you think there are any values in the religious spirit not found in the church or the institution of religion?*

Values, no. But the institutionalized religion is the particular enemy. Institutionalized religion is still used by the present rulers 99-44/100 per cent for strengthening the present regime, whereas the unorganized sentiments act only as a brake upon the development of the individual.

9. *It would appear to me from your definition of policy that the very policy which you define for the Communist Party is coercion very subtle form in case the Communist Party should come into power. The Communist Party separates all education from the church and makes it all secular, and at the same time carries on an active anti-religious campaign through the secular means of education, at one 'tt1ne disarming all forms of religious education and at the some time arming yourself with all the power of secular educo twn to destroy any religion that remains. Now, if propaganda is coercion, which I think most Communists say it is, is*

*it not in that case?*

No, not coercion. The whole problem of freedom of religion becomes real only when it includes freedom not to be religious. It is something that most religious institutions do not accept. I think it is one of the accepted maxims of religious institutions that the mind of the child should be molded so that he will not be capable of rejecting religion. How can such a child have religious freedom if in his formative period he is very carefully isolated from any ideas which challenge these religious beliefs? So long as the child in his formative years is controlled by religious institutions, religious liberty is denied him.

10. *Is that not true when Communists separate him from all religious subjects and subject him to Communism?*

He is free to develop his full powers, and if religion has any basic value and responds to any basic need in the human being, it certainly does not need to be imposed upon the mind of the child, but will come, as the product of a full social life.

11. *But religion is not any more needed than Communism is, and both are products of education, petty much.*

If one takes the view of religion, then he is rejecting its basic claim. That is the Communist view of religion.

12. *Is it true that they stopped Paul Robeson from singing as soon as he sang religious songs over the radio station?*

That never happened. About a week after that lie was circulated, Paul Robeson was greeted in Moscow as an honored guest of the Soviet Union. He sang in the biggest State theaters of Moscow and declared to the newspapers his great pleasure at the comradely reception accorded him in the Soviet Union, the like of which he had received nowhere else in the world. Robeson sang every song he wanted to sing.

13. *Does not the Communist Party forbid parents to give religious instruction to their children? Are they allowed to carry on family worship and instruction of the children?*

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That is all permitted.

14. *Most of the things you have said about religion are critical from the standpoint of function, but I wonder what you say from the philosophical point of view. Communism has a certain world view, and particularly a conception of one's relationship to nature and to the world. You believe that man can cooperate with, and fundamentally subdue, the plain forces of nature. It seems to me that you have an irrational belief, certainly not a thoroughly scientific belief, concerning something that is distinctly in the psychological realm of thought.*

It is true, Communism differs basically in its philosophy from all religions. That is, essentially all religions presuppose a power outside of the human realm directing human beings. Well, there are some religious schools that take on philosophical form, veiling their religious character; but essentially religion is the belief in a higher directing power to which man must submit himself. Often, a certain analogy has been drawn between this feature of religion and that feature of the Communist process where the individual merges himself in the great mass movement and finds his completion in a larger whole. This analogy, however, fails to bring out the essence of the difference. For, whereas in religion the individual merging with God and finding his completion in his religious unity with God becomes separated from the tasks of mankind, in the Communist larger unity he realizes thereby the tasks of taking charge of these problems himself together with his fellows.

15. *What objection would you have to a group of ministers going out and working with the people in their congregations, proclaiming that God is a revolutionary God, that God is definitely working for the establishment here on earth of a Communist cooperative society?*

We would consider such a move a distinct advance over the ordinary type of preaching. It would represent one step in the emancipation from religion.

16. *How do you fit religion into dialectics, what is the role of religion in dialectical materialism?*

Religion does not fit into a dialectical materialist system of thought. It is the enemy of it. One cannot be a thorough materialist, that is, a dialectical materialist, and have any remnants of religious

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beliefs. Both the older materialism that preceded the dialectical materialism and the non-materialist dialectics were in the final analysis of a religious character; but not so dialectical materialism. Dialectical materialism is completely materialist and excludes religion, but, of course, it includes the explanation of religion.

**17.** *Could you not be convinced of dialectical materialism and consider religion of value?*

No. This was already answered in the previous question.

**18.** *Because when you begin to work out the unity of opposites and contradictions, you would have to have religion in the picture.*

Yes, religion must be in the picture in order to be eliminated.

**19.** *Would your dialectics move towards some sort of synthesis, perhaps?*

Well, the dialectical conception of synthesis does not include carrying over obsolete and outlived forms of thought. Some of the functions that are performed by religion will certainly be performed by certain other institutions. There is no question about that. A large part of the functions of organized religion are purely social. All such functions will certainly be taken over by new forms of organizations and thinking.

**20.** *What will be the regenerative center of the Communist movement in about another century when it has gotten a pretty good foothold and achieved its end? What will keep it from degenerating? Enthusiasm, you know, cannot last. Will they go back to Lenin and Marx, do you suppose?*

No, the guarantees against degeneration are in the living forces of the people. They will, of course, make use of the teachings of the best thinkers of the past, but they will have their own lives. The teachings are the instruments representing merely the past growth, which are further developed by the living force of the people themselves.

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21. *Does this development come through contradiction? It is a little hard to see how these contradictions could rise in a Communist world; yet according to dialectical materialism we get development through contradictions.*

The contradictions of the future society will not arise from the economic base. Contradictions in the present society arise from the economic base of society, which fundamentally divides society into warring classes. With the rise of Socialist society and its passing over into full Communism, this, of course, will be absolutely gone. That means that the class struggle will disappear as the motive force of history. In classless society, the dialectic contradictions will not assume the form of class antagonisms.

22. *I just wonder how your philosophical concepts would be able to keep these contradictions in a materialist sense in a materialist realm?*

There will be no fundamental contradictions in the material base of society under Communism.

23. *Do you by that that mean can completely conquer nature, that such things as drought and earthquakes and floods can be completely regulated?*

Man can progressively move in that direction. For example, even in this past year the Soviet Union already demonstrated the power to control droughts. The Soviet Union was hit by droughts, as bad as those which hit the other countries, but the results were vastly different from those in the other countries. In the Soviet Union, where farming had already been brought into the Socialist economic structure, they were able to fight against the drought and reduce its effects so much that the total production of grain dropped only two per cent and the total collections of grain actually increased over the previous year.

Similarly, floods are generally looked upon as a natural phenomenon, but to a great extent they are social phenomena, economic phenomena. The country that suffers the most from floods is China; but anyone who has been in China must recognize that the floods of China are distinctly the product of the militaristic rule of that country and not of anything else, that they are not the product of water, that they are

the product of the breaking down of the social control of that water.

*24. Are not the attitudes of devotion and sacrifice which characterize many ardent Communists religious?*

We consider them social. We consider them as rising out of the sense of social solidarity and the understanding that the individual completes himself in the social whole of which he is a product, and that isolated from it he is nothing. We believe that devotion and sacrifice do not come from the outside to mankind, but arise from the natural development of man.

*25. But you do have, that is the Communists have, a transcendent value, which, the attitude of devotion and one might be tempted to use the word worship-indicates that these attitudes are religious?*

We have values which transcend everyday life, but which do not, however, transcend human life as a whole. Our values arise right out of life. They are not given to us from on high or from God. Our values which transcend daily life are valuable from the whole experience to the human race.

*26. Do you recognize loyalty to this ideal of great importance?*

Yes, but we should say, not loyalty to an ideal, but loyalty to our selves. Loyalty to our best values.

*27. Would you say Communism contains the combination of the dialectic process as far as economic forces are concerned, that is economic forces as the motivating force in the change of history?*

Yes, the economic organization of society, that is, the way in which mankind makes its living, is the basic fact; that is what we mean by economics. That does not eliminate the human factor, for economics is what man does in order to provide food, clothing and shelter. Economic forces are not something which differ from that.

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28. *Do you explain according to the Communist theory that the whole process of history is due to this economic force? Then, if we attain this Communist society then does that thing end the dialectic process or would you say there would still be dialectic forces going into higher development?*

According to our understanding, dialectical thought is the growing awareness of the human mind of the natural processes that go on outside of it, and human action upon nature guided by this understanding. It is not an invention of the human mind which is imposed upon the world, as Sidney Hook maintains it is. It is not merely an instrument of the mind which happens to be useful for the moment by an accident. Dialectics is this growing understanding in the human mind of the process of change and development that goes on throughout the universe. We do not limit it merely to the social sphere or to the class struggle going on now. Dialectics is universal. There is a dialectics of nature, there will always be a dialectics for every phase of life. Since life changes in forms, dialectics will never be eliminated. The dialectical process will not be eliminated in the future society. It will take new forms; it will no longer assume the form of the basic antagonisms of class society.

29. *Do you not consider that dialectical process a hypothesis at all? You consider it as an established fact?*

We consider it as the most generalized truth.

30. *Many of us are interested in seeing a new society brought about and we feel that in the ideals of Jesus we have presented a goal, towards which we are moving and we feel that this gives us something of a motive power. In what way would you say a group of people feeling that way can best work towards a new society, or are they entirely up the wrong tree?*

I think that they could best serve the movement, not by concentrating too much upon the question of religion and its relation to the revolutionary movement, but by concentrating upon the practical questions of the day, as for instance, to what extent there can be brought about a practical cooperation of all forces, religious and non-religious, for certain practical aims. In this field there is great room for work. I think, for example, that people who are essentially religious today and who see that their religious freedom is threatened by the growing reaction in

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America, could very well find those points in the social set-up in which they could cooperate with the non-religious forces in the fight against reaction. So that even from the essentially religious interests of such people there could be points of contact with the anti-religious revolutionary movement, such as the fight against fascism, the fight against war. Certainly war, which has become an immediate menace, is something that violates the religious teachings of the masses; and to mobilize these religious feelings for an effective struggle against war, could be very helpful.

**31.** *Is it because of this basic argument that the Communist Party is willing to enter into the American League Against War and Fascism and enter into a united front with religious groups to fight a given enemy?*

Yes, in the American League the Communists are only one small section and probably a minority; but perhaps a large majority of the people in the American League are religious people, even though they did not come into the League from the religious organizations. A growing number of religious organizations have affiliated, and of all those who have become affiliated through other organizations, undoubtedly the majority are religious. Communists have no hesitation whatever in such contacts with religious people. We do not shy away from religious people at all.

**32.** *To what extent does the Communist Party cooperate with such church federations which are for the destruction of capitalist society?*

We have no direct contact with these organizations as such. Some of the leading individuals in these organizations are active in united front organizations where we are active. In the American League Against War and Fascism, Dr. Harry F. Ward, who is connected with the Methodist Social Service Institution-I forget the exact name-is chairman of the League. Also connected with the League is Dr. Wm. Spofford, who I believe is one of the leaders of the Church League for Industrial Democracy. Only in this indirect way have we contact with these church organizations. Indirectly all of these forces which have an anti-capitalist tendency come into a certain broad cooperation through the American

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League Against War and Fascism.

33. *You said that religion opposes revolutionary activity on two grounds-on the ground of belief and on the ground of its institutional form at the present time. Do you find that in its educational and organizational set-up {here are tendencies towards a reactionary or passive attitude in the present belief and the desire to keep the belief reactionary?*

I would say that the outstanding feature of the development of thought in religious organizations today is the growth of revolutionary trends, and not a growth of reactionary trends. A prominent churchman said to me some months ago that the Communists are going to capture the church before we do the A. F. of L. Of course, we do not believe that; but that serves more than a check, because it tends to emphasize that there is a surging growth of social thought even within church organizations, which is essentially revolutionary thought. It is a struggle against the reactionary character of present capitalist rule; it is a revolt against that, a revolt against all of the reactionary features of capitalism which become more and more pronounced from day to day.

34. *As regards the content of teachings that you discuss. If one were an instructor, one would assume therefore forms of teachings which would tend to produce an uncritical attitude to things, an acceptance of the status quo in the way the thing was taught, apart from the content of what was taught. Do the Communists, in the way in which they teach their own doctrine, promote a critical attitude that can be seen in the method of teaching?*

The Communist teaching is essentially critical in its form and is not directed towards developing uncritical acceptance. Sometimes those who champion the cause of criticism do not understand this, however, because the critical approach of the Communists does not involve the splitting up of the movement into its separate parts, but on the contrary serves to weld it closer together, creating greater unity of thought, so that the very thought process and the very criticism itself become a social and not an individual act, a social act in which the individual participates, but of which the individual himself is not the expression. In the Communist Party this expresses itself in our inner-Party life. We develop our thought through discussions and a very intensive development of literature. We probably circulate more literature per member of our organization by

ten times than any other organization in existence. It is a very intensive collective thought life in which is involved the whole-critical approach to everything.

The revolutionist is first of all a critic of the universe and everything that is in it, including himself. But we avoid at all costs the type of criticism which comes from the individualist society where criticism is purely an individual function. For the Communist, criticism is a social function, an organized function. In bourgeois society criticism is essentially a divisive process. With us it is the opposite; it is the process of consolidation of the masses.

**35.** *You do that by keeping this constant circulation of criticism so that whatever anyone thinks is immediately registered?*

Every view established as the view of our movement has been established as the result of the most thorough criticism.

No point is ever established as the view of the Communists until it has met and answered every possible criticism that can be made.

After the question has been faced and answered, we do not consider it necessary that it shall forever continue to be an open question. There are many questions which are closed for us. Therefore, those people for whom this is still an open question consider that our approach is uncritical because for us the question has already been answered.

That is only because we have met and answered these questions before.

**36.** *Do you claim that this increase in revolutionary temper which shows itself in the church is a social, product and not a product of religious idealism as we do?*

We consider that essentially this comes not out of the religion, but out of the conditions of life of the people who make up these bodies and who, having no better channels to express it through, express it through

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their religious channels.

**37.** *If such religious organizations enter into a united front with the Communist Party, then, in the coming years when the social revolution is successful, will the Communist Party, if it is in power, enter into a campaign against these organizations that have helped in achieving too new society?*

Communists will never carry on any kind of activity which the masses will feel is against their interests. The Communists will never carry on any kind of coercion against religious institutions. Let that be clear. In the Communist fight against religion, the Communists will limit themselves purely to ideological weapons, the weapons of argument and thought, the expression of thought.

**38.** *If the expression or social, thinking that you find in churches is a result of the social situation of the people that are doing the thinking, why do you not find the same amount expressed in other professions? We are not patting ourselves on the back, but I think you will agree thAT there probably is more social thinking done in the ministry over the country than in any other profession.*

We would not say more. There perhaps is still, for the time being, a little more freedom of expression in the church than in the schools. In the schools you have laws directed against the expression of social thinking. Outside of the Catholic church, it is not yet true of the church institutions. However, I wouldn't if I were a member of these church organizations, congratulate myself too much on this. You do not know how long it will last. You may have your Dickstein Committee in the Methodist church soon and in the Protestant churches generally.

**39.** *When you mention the fact that the Communist group would not carry on any offensive against church institutions, are you assuming there, that church institutions would be taken over by the masses who do not control these institution at present?*

We are assuming that there would be no capitalist class organized and controlling these churches. These religious institutions would be controlled by the people who are in them. They would not be a drug in the new society, because the masses who would be in them would be actively

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cooperating in the new society.

40. *If a church group were definitely counter-revolutionary and acting against the Communist regime, there would be no hesitation in wiping that group out?*

It would be dealt with on political, not religious, grounds.

41. *Would you agree that there is a gambling chance that the people in the religious organizations might make such a powerful force working for social justice in case, we have a revolution, that, the Communist Party might reopen the question?*

I think the more the masses now in the churches become active in the social struggle, the less need will they find for religion, so that the more they participate in the revolution, the less likelihood is there of the church becoming an essential feature of the new social set-up.

42. *Would you say that the participation in building a new social order would be a substitute for religion?*

The religion itself, even where it does not disappear, will tend to become deinstitutionalized.

43. *If we are going forward into the period of fascism, is there not the possibility of religion keeping alive this spirit of revolt, because of certain factors that have always been more or less connected with religion and for that reason it may become a very powerful ally?*

I think the church as an organized institution is much more likely to fall under the control of the fascist forces.

44. *Where do you find the evil, in the capitalist or capitalism?*

Both, the capitalist system is so essentially evil that it cannot produce good men at the top.

45. *Which is first man or capitalism?*

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Mankind is first, but not man as an individual.

*46. If in the social struggle the church does not line up with the fascist organizations, but proves to be helpful to the social revolution, will there be any recognition of that fact?*

Certainly, I think the Communists would be more happy about that than anybody else. Perhaps we will be surprised.

*47. I do not think religion today as we understand it, will postpone happiness for the future life. We are working definitely for an abundant life here, rather than in the future. Some of us do not believe in the hereafter, and are striving to establish a good society here. I think we are working towards the same objective.*

It is incorrect to draw an analogy between the vague socio religious aspirations and Communism. There is, of course, a positive social content accompanying some religious teachings, though not all; but these are not the feature which gives them the character of religion.

*48. I think we are arguing about terms. What we call religion you call something else. It is a matter of definition.*

I think the things that we Communists call religion are, you might put it, the "established truths" about religion. They may take very subtle forms, but they will always reveal that supernatural character that we are speaking about here.

*49. Every idea has its political. and social effect. You cannot have an idea without having it have some political connection. Therefore, in the Communist set-up we are open to your definite pattern of thought, ideology. Any variation from that would be counter revolutionary, even if perhaps some people think it a higher step. In other words, the Communist pattern may become crystallized just as the capitalist system is now, so that there will be no progress, no change.*

The Communists have no fixed system in the sense of a hard and fast strait-jacket. The very essence of Communist thinking is the progressive development and realization of all the creative forces of the human mind. That is the essence of the whole Communist position of life

as seen in the Communist program of practical action. Certainly, no one can say that where the Communists are the directing power, as in the Soviet Union, the mind has been put into a straight-jacket. There has never been in human history such a release of all the initiative of the individual and the development of capacities as in the Soviet Union. You can go into the Soviet Union and find men occupying the highest positions in every field of life, from the arts and sciences to government, who but five or six years ago were backward people on the land, the most backward illiterate peasants. What society in the world ever showed such an enormous development of the capacity of the individual human mind? Never in history has anything like it been seen. So, if you judge by experience, you cannot draw the conclusion that Communism tends to straight-jacket human development.

50. *A little while ago, you said the individual, as such, is not worth any consideration at all.*

I said the individual finds his development and completion only as a part of the group, as a part of society. Isolated, the individual is nothing.

51. *Do the Communists consider it psychologically possible to build up a classless so , a society in which no classe, exist?*

Yes, the Communists accept that view.

52. *But in practice there is always a class.*

In the Soviet Union classes still exist, that is true. And the class struggle within the Soviet Union is still sharp. But enormous progress is being made towards the classless society precisely through that struggle.

Precisely through the class struggle, do we come to the classless society. Some believe that the way to get a classless society is to stop fighting, to stop the class struggle; in this we disagree. We say that precisely the only way to come to a society without classes is through the development of the class struggle to the point where one particular class the working class obtains power. By making this one class predominant, that particular class whose historic revolutionary role is to remove the basis for class division, we can reach the classless society but only in this

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way. The interests of this class lie in doing away with that material foundation of society which produces classes. Only when you abolish that which produces classes, can you abolish the classes themselves. What produces classes is the division of society into those who own and those who work. When that is abolished and those who work are also those who own, then it is only a matter of time that all classes in society will disappear.

*53. Has the Communist line on religion changed in the last three or four years, particularly in regard to the Negro in America? Now people who still maintain religious beliefs can join the Party. Is this a change in the line of the Party, or has it been a develop,?*

It may be said to be a change in the growing understanding of Party members on the meaning of Party line, but in the authoritative expressions of these lines there is no change. Our standard text book is the writings of Lenin on these questions--writings that extend over many years, mostly before the revolution in Russia. There certainly is no essential change.

There are, of course, certain changes in our application of this line because of the changing situation. There were, for example, a few years ago very few practical questions concerning our relations to social movements within the church because such social movements were largely non-existent. Today their existence takes on an immediate practical political importance that brings out features of the Communist attitude towards religion which were not outstanding before.

But it is a change of development of events of the day rather than any change of the development of the Party line.

*54. On that same question, the official tactic perhaps for the immediate situation has been changed in regard to some of these groups, but is it not true that many of the rank and file have failed to catch up with the change? I refer to your discussion before of the inner-Party life, the discussion that goes on within the Party, it seemed that that inthca'fied that many of the Party members, whom we consider to be Party members, do not seem to follow the official line on many of these questions. I am thinking in particular of instances in the American League where trouble seems to have come out of the failure of Party members to adopt a united front policy.*

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I have an idea that probably most of such difficulties that you speak of come not from Party members, but from non-Party people who may call themselves Communists. It is true that many of our best friends are sometimes our worst enemies because they do not familiarize themselves with the correct position on fundamental questions. Of course, it is also true that not all Party members are fully grounded in all of these questions, for our Party reflects all the shortcomings of the working class. We have 31,000 members where a year and a half ago we had from 17,000 to 18,000 members. That means we have had 14,000 members coming into the Party in a year and a half; some have been in for only a couple of months and are certainly not experts on the policy of the Party.

**55.** *Is there also Communist propaganda among the Negroes? Is there a good field there?*

Considerable. Yes, we could say that this statement was made in a recent conference. It was reported in the newspapers that a Negro religious leader had stated that the churches were in danger of losing their hold over the Negroes because of the tremendous inroads made by the Communists and had therefore called upon the churches to fight the Communists more energetically; this is some evidence of how strong is the political influence of the Communists among the Negro population generally. We have not any great organization among the Negro masses. Our organizational strength among them is growing; but the influence of our ideas, especially those ideas expressed in the practical day-to-day struggle for Negro rights, creates a tremendous effect among the majority of Negroes in America. In this sense many say that the majority of the Negroes are influenced by the Communists.

**56.** *Do you regard the Hebrew prophets and Jesus as historical figures, and if so, have they social significance?*

They are historical figures at least in the sense that they have played quite a role in the historical development of the human mind. Whether they were the product of the human mind or whether they had some more direct material basis is not important to us. We do not enter the field of higher criticism.

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**57.** *How seriously is the Communist Party taking the present drive to outlaw it? Today's papers give the report of the Dickstein Committee which, if it is embodied in bills and these bills are passed, will eventually put the Communist Party out of business?*

We take them very seriously; not that we think that that will put the Communist Party out of business, because the Communist Party will never be put out of business. We take these proposals very seriously because we see that they are part of a system of development which is represented by Roosevelt's actions in the automobile situation, by the whole company union drive, by the drive to smash the trade unions and to outlaw the Communist Party as an inevitable feature of such a drive against the working class as a whole. Under the legislation proposed by the Dickstein Committee, it would become illegal to quote the Declaration of Independence.

## Liberate Oppression

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*by Mark Maxey, Co-Chair, PCUSA Religious Affairs Commission*

Marxism is not about atheism, Chairman Gus Hall<sup>1</sup> was famous for saying, “Our quarrel is with capitalism, not God.” Karl Marx was absolute in opposing oppression and not religion. However, a true Marxist is about the worker and their rights. Religion should not necessarily be a focal point in our struggles, but to each to their own. But my focus is on the oppression. Oppression keeps us struggling for our rights/dignity which keeps us from working for a more loving peaceful existence.

Each culture has their own creation mythology<sup>2</sup>. The Judeo-Christian beliefs are those of the tribe Israel. Yet the oldest known culture are the Sumerians<sup>3</sup> which pre-dates Jewish cosmology by thousands of years. Within the Sumerian cosmology are a flood, savior born, death, and resurrection. The Jewish retelling of this mythos does not negate it’s possible truth but yet presents itself to their own cosmos.

Fr. Bede Griffiths<sup>4</sup>, a Benedictine monk who spoke of the perennial wisdom<sup>5</sup>. This perspective in modern spirituality which views each of the world’s religious traditions as sharing a single, metaphysical truth or origin from which all esoteric and exoteric knowledge and doctrine have grown. Fr. Bede lived amongst Hindus in India and developed a synergy of Catholic and Hindu rites and spirituality. His approach was a social paradox that embraced different cultures to live communally in a peace and democratic manner. Which is to say, very Marxist.

### **The Basic Principles of Marxism - Critique Sociale<sup>6</sup>**

Marxism is a way of thinking critically, but it is not a “system”: “I

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<sup>1</sup> <http://lilleskole.us/school/abcs/religion.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cs.williams.edu/~lindsey/myths/myths.html>

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dating\\_creation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dating_creation)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bede-griffiths.com/bede-griffiths/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perennial\\_philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perennial_philosophy)

<sup>6</sup> <https://libcom.org/library/basic-principles-marxism-critique-sociale>

## **Religion & Communism**

have never established a ‘socialist system’”, Karl Marx wrote in his “Notes on Adolph Wagner’s Lehrbuch der politician Ökonomie” (1880). Marxism is the analysis of the development of the world as it is, a method that must forge an intimate connection between practice and theory.

Here are the basic principles of Marxism:

Opposition to an economic system based on inequality and on the alienation and exploitation of the majority (by means of the system of wage labor), a system whose purpose is to obtain profits for some people rather than satisfying the needs of all. This describes capitalism, but one can obviously imagine other systems that would present similar essential characteristics, to which Marxists would be equally opposed.

For the transformation of society, Marxism considers that a revolutionary process that will lead to a society based on cooperation and the free distribution of goods and provision of services is necessary.

“The emancipation of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves.” This principle is inherent to real Marxism, which implies democracy and self-emancipation; it also means that democracy is the indispensable foundation for a new society (called socialism or communism). This society, liberated from the diverse forms of domination, will have to be freely constructed by its members.

Internationalism, which is simultaneously the recognition of the common interests of the workers of the entire world and of the need to struggle on a world scale, and of the goal of abolishing nations in the transition to a human world community.

The knowledge and analysis of History (the materialist conception of history).

The recognition of the existence of social classes that divide men and women into distinct segments of the population; the recognition of the profound inequalities and injustices that separate these classes; and the recognition that as long as society is divided into classes, there will be conflicts between these classes (the class struggle).

As a result, while they participate in the day-to-day class struggle of the workers, Marxists work on behalf of a reorganization of society that

will put an end to this class division.

The free exercise of the critical spirit. “Doubt everything”, Marx said; for the goal is to perceive reality as it is, in order to understand it better and thus to transform it.

These principles, or some of them, could very well be embraced by other political and social tendencies: if this is the case, then so much the better! Marxism does not attempt to isolate itself, quite the contrary: the goal is to contribute to the constitution of a movement of all of the society for the creation of “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*).

*Critique Sociale, March 12, 2009*

That said, let’s embrace this thought. For these ideals to be realized the Marxist communists need to join hand in hand with other like minded leftists grassroots organizations. The Marxist followers alone can’t realize these goals by themselves. The current progressive organizations (Occupy, Black Lives Matter, AIM, Our Revolution, Sen. Bernie Sanders, etc...) have so much more in common. Joining together helps all of the humankind to eventually live in these Marxists parameters.

Now, hear me out, the other organizations need to also do their part in weeding out from society the neoliberalism and religious fanaticism that leads to oppression. It was oppression that Marx was against, not God. If the true nature of spiritualism, as in the perennial vein, then this nature by the natural order is non oppressive. What is oppressive in religion is legalistic rhetoric which is called ideology. Ideology is ideas, and true Marxism is not about ideas but rather realistic.

Consider the source of the idea that socialism can never work.<sup>7</sup>

Opponents of socialism, who also go back through the ages, say it can’t work. Additionally, they say that socialism is unfair or undemocratic. It is neither, but you can see why a capitalist would say that.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://lilleskole.us/school/abcs/socializm.htm>

## **Religion & Communism**

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels did not waste a lot of words trying to describe the heavenly benefits of a future socialist society. They published a list of some likely features that included the idea that the main factories and instruments of production would be owned and run democratically by the people.


Any religious thought that is oppressive is not the true nature of God if one so believes in God. Using religion to disqualify Marxist goals nullifies Marx's goals. Oppression at any level denies the true freedom that an individual inherently has. So in a sense, fundamentalism is an oppressive tool to rule over a person instead of bringing out the proletariat qualities in a person.


In Conclusion, part of the struggle we face is relieving the oppression before us. That is realistic. We must keep struggling together. We must speak out when we see oppression of any type. Religion is a choice, but oppression of any kind is not a choice. Our goal is in liberating the oppressed.






Marx





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## Religion & Communism



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Program



Points of Unity

*PCUSA 1st Congress*



Constitution

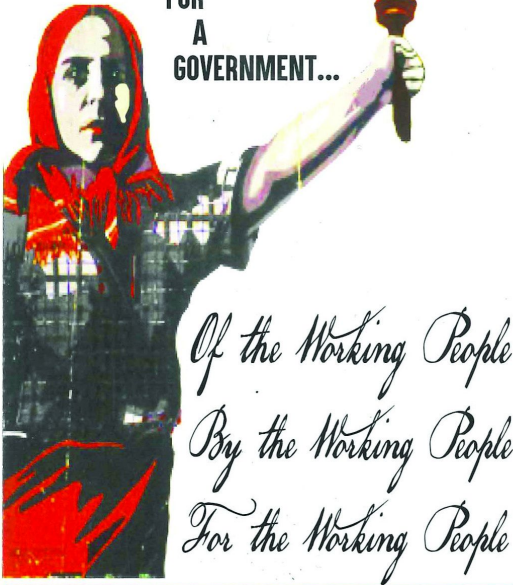
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To demand an agenda for social justice

To fight corruption

To demand accountability and transparency from our elected representatives.

To bring corporate domination of our economy to an end.

To establish people's councils in every community with authority to enforce laws that protect the people from abuse of authority.

[www.movement4peoplesdemocracy.org](http://www.movement4peoplesdemocracy.org)



### Our Mission

The aim of all Friends of the Soviet People is international cooperation in building socialism and solidarity with the anti-imperialist forces of the world who are struggling against U.S. Imperialism - the main enemy of humanity.

### Our History

U.S. Friends of the Soviet People is the successor to the National Council of American - Soviet Friendship (NCASF) Started in 1918 as "Hands Off Russia" Committees.

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**Labor Today** is published by the **Labor United for Class Struggle (LUCS)**, a nationwide caucus of union and non-represented workers. Our mission is to unite the working class to fight against the power of transnational capital. Currently only 11% of the U.S. workforce is organized into unions. Most of these workers are employed in the public sector, and are legally denied the right to strike. The most militant of these workers are the postal workers employed by the U.S. Postal Service. For this reason, they are under attack. However, they are not the only ones.

The attacks on the public sector and its workforce are part of a larger plan developed years ago by Milton Friedman and the University of Chicago School of Business. The plan is referred to as neoliberalism and its main feature is austerity. Reducing the number of federal , state, and municipal employees and cutting pensions and Social Security are the first part of the plan which President Ronald Reagan called "starving the beast". Under this plan, all government services are virtually eliminated with the exception of the military, and the Executive, Judicial, and Legislative Branches of government. This is also called Social Darwinism, or survival of the fittest.

Our mission with **Labor Today** and the **LUCS** caucus is to unite all of Labor, to give them a voice regardless of industry or type of work without regard to status: union or unrepresented. We provide assistance to the Walmart workers, the Fight for \$15 and a union and other efforts. We are transnational and we support the mission and policies of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).

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The **League of Young Communists USA** is the Communist Youth Organization of the Party of Communists USA.

The Party of Communists USA traces its roots from dropped clubs of the Communist Party USA. Members of the New York Transport Workers Union club, the Arts & Entertainment CPUSA club, the Staten Island club, the Buffalo NY club, the Los Angeles club and various comrades scattered around the country, such as in California, Hawaii, Illinois, Minnesota and Texas, were the original founders of the Party of Communists USA. The PCUSA and the LYCUSA are dedicated to upholding Marxism-Leninism, scientific socialism, internationalism and Socialism-Communism. Our focus is on class struggle, workers' rights, and creating the conditions for a socialist revolution. The PCUSA established the League of Young Communists USA as the successor to the Young Communist League of the CPUSA, which was officially disbanded in 2015. The YCL had been in existence for almost one hundred years.

<http://www.leagueofyoungcommunistsusa.org>